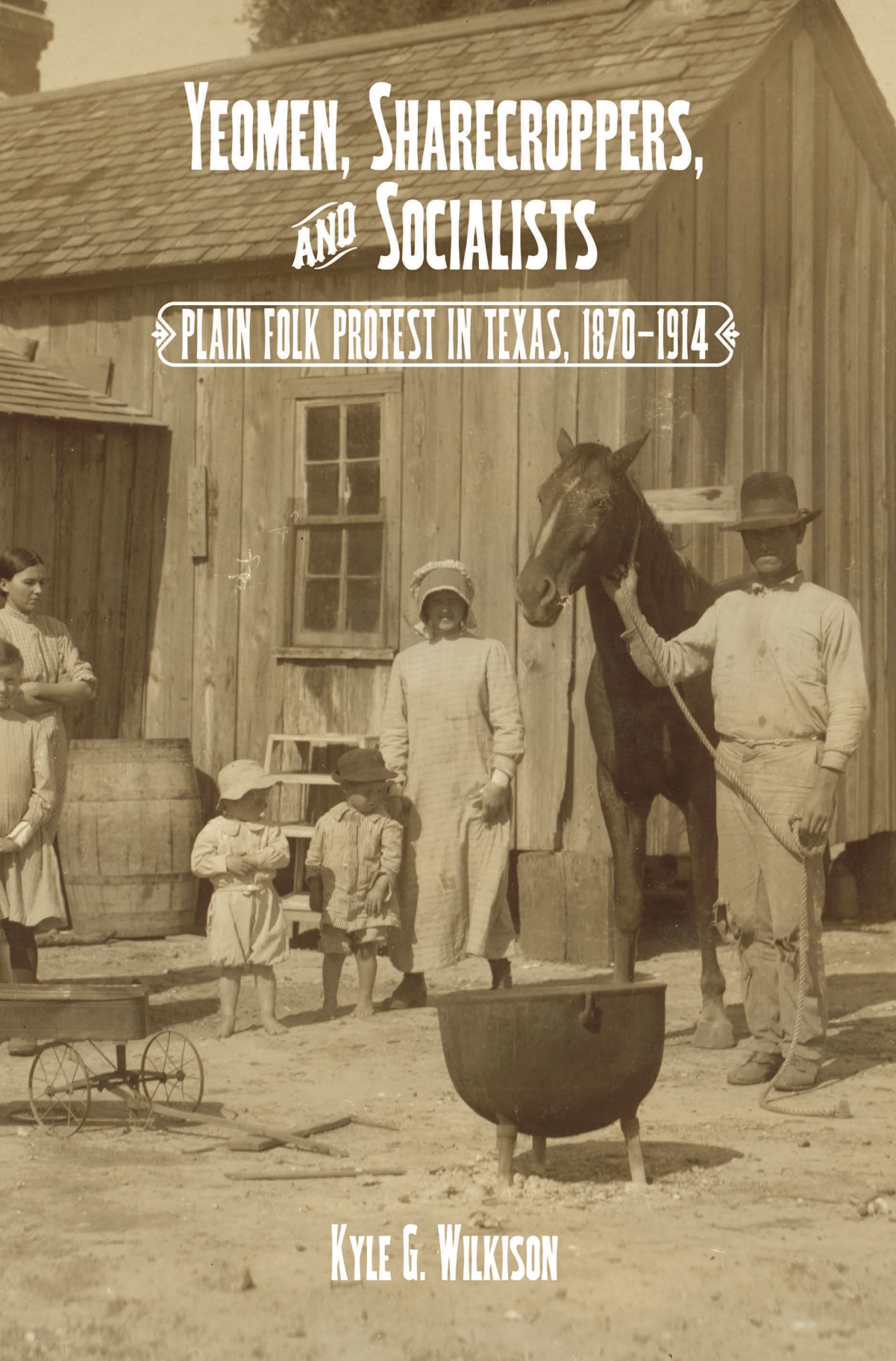


YEOMEN, SHARECROPPERS, *AND* SOCIALISTS

» PLAIN FOLK PROTEST IN TEXAS, 1870-1914 «



KYLE G. WILKISON

YEOMEN, SHARECROPPERS, *AND* SOCIALISTS

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KYLE G. WILKISON

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TO
Debra Greenwell Wilkison
AND
Charles B. Wilkison Sr. (1925–99)

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**YEOMEN,
SHARECROPPERS,
AND SOCIALISTS**

» CHAPTER I «

INTRODUCTION

In 1912 a rumor spread through one rural Texas community that the world was on fire; London had burned already, the flames had leaped the Atlantic, and the conflagration was headed straight for them. News of Halley's Comet caused others to search the sky in fear and wonder for signs of the end of the world. Moved by the comet's approach, a contrite blackland tenant farmer quit drinking whiskey and took up a frenetic regimen of attending every revival and camp meeting within riding distance. Imaginations further leaped in 1916 at the sudden appearance of a fiery light on the dark horizon of southwestern Hunt County. As the largest barn in the county burned, people walked and rode for miles through the night toward the unearthly glow, confessing their belief that the end of the world was upon them.¹ Perhaps this anxiety was not so misplaced in the world of the rural yeoman community. Those who tried to make their livings in the semi-subsistence manner of their parents and grandparents well knew that the triumphant national marketplace was rapidly transforming their erstwhile agrarian world.

What follows is an exploration of that transformation in Texas during the critical period from 1870 to 1914. This rural poor majority had inherited a common culture based in large part on neighborliness and land ownership. Neighborly interdependence provided the foundation for family survival and community independence; widespread land ownership provided the foundation for family independence that fos-

tered and allowed for neighborliness. The end of land ownership as a majority experience also ended family and community independence as the majority way of life. This work seeks to examine the responses to that economic transformation in order to frame a question rooted in a people's culture and asks what, in fact, did the rural poor majority value, what did they choose, and what would they have chosen if they could? And how did their struggle manifest itself in the tension between a traditional culture and an economic setting increasingly at odds with that culture?

Between 1870 and 1910 a population explosion and the arrival of the national market via new railroads drove land prices beyond the reach of self-sufficient but cash-poor Texas yeomen. Increasingly concentrated land ownership and the rise of the absentee-landlord forced the abandonment of diversified production for self-sufficiency in favor of cotton. Turn-of-the-century landless farmers slowly discovered the permanence of their status while all along losing wealth to the prosperous few. Yet their communities strove to retain family, work, church, and community-centered values. A minority even publicly protested the new economy, couching their critique in the language of the Protestant, evangelical rural church. Likewise, radical protest parties found disproportionate levels of support among these rural people. Ultimately, however, their protests came to naught. By the early twentieth century they were too poor, and it was too late.

After the Civil War, thousands of Southerners poured into Texas, traveling alone, as families, as congregations, and even as communities. Most settled in the eighty-odd counties of the eastern third of the state (East and Central Texas), causing unprecedented population growth between 1870 and 1910. Among these fast-growing communities was North Texas' Hunt County, which occupied a key position astride East and Central Texas. Immigrants' reactions to what they found in Hunt County varied, depending on their expectations.

Those hoping for the plantation economy of the Old South were disappointed in 1870s Hunt County. In 1877 recently arrived Mississippian Minerva Thomas wistfully wrote home that Texas would be "a great country, the greatest in the world if only we had labor." She longed to return to Mississippi where the availability of African American labor would save her children from field work. Writing to a Mississippi kinsman after southern Democrats "redeemed" that state she inquired hopefully, "How does your system of labor work now, under democratic rule[?] We have been told that the negroes work better & are less trouble

now.”² Except in the handful of antebellum plantation counties, such a life in Texas only became real for the few and then only after years of awaiting the arrival of railroads, cotton, and tenants.

On the other hand, those seeking to replicate the world of the Southern yeomen found East and Central Texas much to their liking in the 1860s and 1870s. One such settler, Mollie Guthrie McWhorter, recalled a self-sufficient community lacking material comforts but abundant with what historian Robert C. McMath Jr. has aptly called “habits of mutuality.”³ McWhorter’s family and neighbors raised a variety of subsistence crops, livestock, and produce and “very little cotton.” They might haul a bit of that cotton to faraway Jefferson, Texas, or Shreveport, Louisiana, to trade for coffee and sugar and the handful of items families themselves could not make or grow. Women spun and wove the rest of the cotton into cloth, or men braided it into plow lines. They took for granted that most of what they needed they had to make and did without manufactured goods as a matter of course. Factory-made objects, such as the first glass-chimneyed lamps brought into the community, they considered rare luxuries. Reliance on neighbors, on the other hand, they thought a commonplace necessity. It would have been unseemly had a neighbor slaughtered a beef without sending meat to families in the vicinity. That and similar practices were routinely reciprocated. To do otherwise risked forfeiting community good will and access to the only social safety net in existence. At the center of these poor but independent people’s lives were the two powerful social institutions of visiting and church. Denominational exclusivity fared poorly in such settings. McWhorter recalled that the first church building in the neighborhood served as a “union” church used by all believers (mainly Methodists and Baptists). There her family attended “protracted meetings” wherein the faithful revived and converts confessed. In such emotional settings the bonds of community grew apace: “They would have feet washings but did not believe in shouting but I remember one time at one of their meetings my father got happy and he jumped up and he walked the floor and he laughed he was so happy. I remember a practiced [sic] meeting at Shady Grove when all got happy. One young man hollered out ‘this beats riding wild horses don’t it boys?’” In McWhorter’s tightly knit world, neighbors extended loans without a written note. The scarcity of banks little mattered to subsistence farmers who kept what money they possessed in their homes. Those violating the common trust fled, knowing the summary nature of community retribution. Hardly individualists, in every major endeavor these neighbors cooperated, whether

slaughtering hogs at first frost or partaking of the joys of camp meeting revivals in July after the crops were laid by.⁴ Yet this complacent plain folk community was already in trouble. In the coming decades, fundamental changes eradicated its sustaining economic underpinning, the widespread ownership of land.

Within one generation, then, societal reality ceased to match cultural expectations. Under cotton's aegis, many would come to know the new poverty of propertylessness. Of course, most of the plain folk had always lived poorly by outsiders' standards. But equally apparent to outsiders had been their cantankerously guarded liberty based on their ownership and control of productive property and a strong tendency to avoid risking too much in commercial enterprise. By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, observant agrarians could see the end of their world.

In their support for various rural protest movements, a significant minority of the rural poor in Texas signaled an unwillingness to surrender quietly. Perhaps, as others have argued, this last great manifestation of plain folk discontent was as much against modernity as it was against the structure of the new economy. This, of course, assured its failure. Following a consistently class-based analysis of their economic predicament comprised the kind of anti-traditional rationalism against which they kicked. Most of the rural poor who supported the Greenbacker, Populist, or Socialist critiques did so out of a sense of moral outrage over what had befallen their own families and communities, not because they engaged in class-conscious analysis or subscribed to theories of scientific materialism.

By the early 1900s, there were those among the poor majority—disillusioned, alienated, and disfranchised—who could scarce retain their fathers' faith in the practical workings of the American republic. Asked in 1915 why he had stopped voting, Lamar County sharecropper Levi Steward replied, "Well, it did not look like it done any good. It seemed like it went their way, anyhow." Writing in 1902, tenant farmer Pinkney Bowie bitterly observed that "the big man has it all his Way. . . . I have just about Decided that Texas is A sorry state when it comes to the Poor man getting a Show."⁵

By 1910 landlessness had become the majority condition among Texas farmers. With loss of place came loss of cultural identity and loss of freedom of action. Landlessness ended a concrete freedom, a daily practical reality of being at liberty, taken for granted by their forebears. The end of their independence also meant a profound cultural transfor-

mation. Disconnected from their “places,” tenancy promoted—indeed, often required—geographical mobility. As a practical matter they lost some of their identity as a people when they lost ownership of land and the ability to practice the specifics of their culture. Consequently, their descendants were not only cut off from control of productive property but also cut off from much of what would have given identity and meaning to their cultural heritage as well.

That loss works against naming them now. They sometimes called themselves “poor” or “country” (in affirmation), but mostly they did not articulate collective labels beyond their connection with their own local communities. Family and community made up the basic identifying social unit with strongest ties between those closest in blood or geography. I refer to them here as yeomen, plain folk, and the rural poor majority. Certainly, the latter term has more application after 1900 than before it. Furthermore, I use the term “plain folk” in the conventional way it has been used by two generations of historians to mean the middling, common class of farmers in the American South; additionally, however, I seek to broaden that definition in turn-of-the-century Texas to include most of the rural poor majority. Whatever the economic demarcations had been in the Old South between the plain folk and “poor whites,” in early twentieth-century Texas such distinctions made less and less difference. By 1910 in Texas, economic transformation and generations of intermarriage had rendered most working farmers heirs of plain folk culture on the one hand, and, on the other, for the first time, most Texas farmers were landless tenants and sharecroppers.

In “Plain Folk Reconsidered: Historiographical Ambiguity in Search of Definition,” historian Samuel C. Hyde Jr. tackles the problem of a rigorous definition of the antebellum Southern plain folk. The term “plain folk” was coined by mid-twentieth-century Vanderbilt historian Frank L. Owsley in his *Plain Folk of the Old South*, which posited an antebellum South where common whites were prosperous, middling, agrarian, and dominant. That is, dominant in both numbers and in political influence.⁶

Hyde believes the term “plain folk” has become “greatly muddled” within the discipline and needs a clear economic definition. He acknowledges consensus only in that the antebellum plain folk were farmers (historians have consistently omitted “non-elite” townspeople) and that they farmed 150 acres or less and owned five or fewer slaves. He seeks to both more rigorously define the category and to broaden it (upwardly) by considering land use and by recalculating the number of slaves a plain

folk farmer might own. He argues that by taking into account the age and gender of slaves, one may include farmers who owned more than five slaves but who only possessed five slaves who were in fact “hands.” “The key to finding the plain folk, then, is to identify the majority group who were landowning, self-working farmers whose ownership of slaves did not render their own contribution to the work output largely managerial. . . . Whether nonslaveholder or slaveholder, if they owned few enough slaves consistent with the improved land they maintained to suggest self-working status and if they embraced the culture of common Southerners (separate and distinct from that of the impoverished class or the wealthy), they should be counted among the plain folk.”⁷

Like Hyde, Donald Winters seeks a clearer economic definition of yeoman or plain folk. And, at least for pre-Civil War Tennessee, Winters defines them as the 60 percent falling in the third through eighth deciles of wealth-holding in predominantly agricultural communities. On the other hand, in *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865–1980*, Gilbert C. Fite categorizes the post-Civil War middle class “family farmer”—he does not use the term “plain folk”—as working (not necessarily owning) between 100 and 200 acres but estimates that by 1900 only between 35 to 50 percent of southern agriculturalists fell into this class. For Fite, by the turn of the twentieth century, somewhere between 48 to 63 percent of southern farmers could be classified as “sharecroppers and poorer tenants.”⁸

Hyde’s reconsideration of the plain folk increases our understanding especially of the antebellum agricultural white class structure. It only runs into trouble at defining the lower end and when adapting it to New South conditions. For example, he asserts that part of the definition depended on “respectability,” which, as Hyde knows, had a hereditary component in long-settled communities. He states that the poor whites begin where the “level of production suggests shiftlessness and irresponsibility.”⁹ The terms “shiftless” and “irresponsible” are troublesome concepts. As John Solomon Otto has shown, outsiders often mischaracterized plain folk as poor white because, by the outsiders’ standards, their circumstances appeared spartan or even squalid. Terms such as “shiftless”—loaded with historic racial and class malice in southern culture—are hard to measure and shed more heat than light.¹⁰

Thus, current historians of the rural poor majority in the South disagree about how far down into the ranks of “poor whites” the yeoman or “plain folk” extend. Essentially, one group seeks to draw the plain

folk as a large, socially dominant group with a sharp line between them and poor whites. The other camp agrees with the greater plain folk thesis but portrays a blurred line between plain folk and poor white. One difference is in markers. The first group of historians tends to look at external markers—objective and subjective, but still external—which are mostly readily measurable economic ones but also include “productive” and “respectable” versus “shiftlessness and irresponsibility.” The others—including this work—are biased toward internal markers and tend to ask who the people thought they were. This goes to culture but not at the expense of measurable economic factors. Of course, asking who the plain folk or rural poor majority thought they were leads back to the problem of identity.

“Common” may indeed be the best term. Oral interviewees sometimes told me, even in settings where it was demonstrably not true in economic terms, that “we were all the same” and used “common” as a compliment.¹¹

Like their white neighbors, rural African American Texans tended to live in tightly knit kinfolk communities, including a dramatically increasing number of landowners during 1870–1914. In daily life rural-dwelling African American Texans lived much like their white counterparts in fundamental ways. Their historical consciousness was, of course, distinctive, as were other features of African American culture. But, the greatest gulf between black and white rural working people existed not in the differences in each other’s culture, but, instead, by the chasm created by the white majority’s belief in and practice of white supremacy. Indeed, this alone produced most of the social, economic, and physical vulnerability that made African American life different from that of whites.¹²

While later-twentieth-century Texans often identified their state with the American West, in the early 1900s most of its people were culturally southerners, especially in the most heavily populated counties in the eastern third of the state. Throughout its history Texas has hosted a number of distinctive economies due to its size and geographic diversity, and those differences evidenced themselves during 1870–1914. Even within the eighty-three-county eastern third of the state, isolated here for study due to its relative cohesiveness, two distinct subregions emerge. About one-half of the counties comprised East Texas proper, an area of relatively high rainfall, intermittent great forests, and sandy and mixed loam soils. This forty-county bloc is anchored in the north by the

twenty-first-century cities and towns of Texarkana (Bowie County) and Paris (Lamar County) and in the south by Beaumont (Hardin County) and Houston (Harris County); by 1910 more than 900,000 Texans lived in these counties. Just to the west, the great blackland prairie, running almost the length of the state from the Red River to San Antonio, dominated the remaining area in fact and in lore. This forty-three-county swath of Central Texas is anchored in the north by Sherman (Grayson County) and Nocona (Montague County) and in the south by Bellville (Austin County) and Lockhart (Caldwell County); by 1910 more than 1.5 million Texans resided here. Hunt County, the community most closely studied, straddles both regions and contains characteristics of East and Central Texas.¹³

At the end of the nineteenth century Texas yeomen farmers exhibited both a high degree of community independence and individual family interdependence based on the widespread ownership of land and the liberty such property afforded even the common lot. But when the majority lost control of the land upon which they worked and lived, this marked a sharp social and economic slippage of which they were keenly aware. Because of their unmet cultural expectations and the moral basis of their social judgments, they came to reject the practical outcome, if not the theory, of the new century's economy. A few consciously critiqued the theory as well. This dissent took the form of the Greenbacker, Granger, and agrarian Democrat protests of the 1870s and 1880s and the Populist "moment" of the 1890s whose collapse left a disgruntled remnant supporting agrarian socialism. The Socialist Party of America's critique of capitalism found vibrant resonance among a militant minority due to (not in spite of) their traditional cultural values.

Despite their neighborly tendencies, however, the rural poor majority fissured along several lines, old and new. The oldest and most important divide was race. Newer dividers included physical and social distances wrought by geographical mobility and economic disparities. Nevertheless, in spite of pressures old and new, during the 1910s this community stubbornly clung to social values and habits from its landowning past.

That cotton's ascendancy in post-Civil War Texas replaced an older way of life is evident in a variety of records. Based primarily on quantitative data from the published U.S. Censuses, the county manuscript censuses, and the county tax rolls, the next two chapters describe in some detail the small farmers' economy during a critical era of transformation. Chapter 2 details changes in the agricultural economy of the

eighty-three East and Central Texas counties, from 1870 to 1910. Over those decades farmers saw the size of farms and their ability to remain self-sufficient decline even as the rate of landlessness and the amount of farmland devoted to cotton dramatically increased. Chapter 3 analyzes the impact of these changes on the household economy in Hunt County where tenancy and poverty rates soared.

The plain folk community consisted of a people bound together by cycles of seasonal work, habits of cooperation, and culture. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the people's everyday life and culture from their perspective. Contemporary accounts and oral interviews show a community that survived well into the twentieth century but one in which economic dislocation played an ever-increasing, destabilizing role.

Rural Texans vigorously debated the morality of the changing economy, especially concentration of land ownership. Based on newspapers and other archival collections, chapter 6 describes this faith-based debate between those defending and those attacking the new economic order through the voices of the indigenous intelligentsia—rural preachers and others—from within the rural poor majority's faith communities.

A significant minority from among the rural poor manifested their discontent at the ballot box. Based in part on state and county voting records, chapter 7 explores the voting behavior of a radical minority among the plain folk over a thirty-year period. From the 1880s to 1914 rural Texans supported protest parties and dissenter candidates at greater rates than their town-dwelling neighbors. That tendency reached its numerical peak in the 1890s during the Populist era and its peak militancy during the Socialist period some fifteen years later. But voting Socialist or Populist indicated no striking departure for rural Texans; those who cast such ballots were simply engaging in a relatively more intense expression of the common people's community values. Such voting behavior stemmed from the moral and economic precepts of the fading yeoman culture itself. While most rural poor people did not vote for socialism, those who did cast such votes because of, not in spite of, their traditional cultural values. On the other hand, more powerful cultural currents overwhelmed the dissenters, providing yet another instance of the failure of class formation in the American South. The Populists had made a flawed effort in the 1890s, and the Socialists reprised that effort—if further to the left—in the 1910s. Both attempts failed, however, because of the power of culture: namely racism and religion. Even when the Texas Socialists hushed their international principles to pander to southern racial norms, and even after they successfully enlisted “socialist preach-

ers” to spread the good news of class consciousness, they failed to sway mainstream Texas voters. Nevertheless, the final failure ought not blot out the intriguing truth that such a people and place produced a series of debates, reaching their height in the 1910s, regarding the relationship between the distribution of property ownership and the good society.

» CHAPTER 2 «

FROM HOMEPLACE TO NO PLACE

The Changing Texas Economy, 1870–1910

Like Jacob wooing Rachel and mistakenly marrying her veiled sister, the yeomanry courted cotton's prosperity but married instead poverty and dependence. Farmers' loss of independence in early-twentieth-century Texas lay very near the root of their iron marriage to cotton and its accompanying socio-economic system. But cotton did not eradicate diversified subsistence production; landlords did.

An independent yeoman community persisted in post-Civil War Texas years after cotton tenancy displaced it elsewhere in the South.¹ Rural people in East and Central Texas maintained a way of life based on self-sufficient production until majority landownership ended during the first decade of the twentieth century. As late as 1880, cotton claimed only 9 percent of farm acreage in the eastern third of the state. By 1910, however, cotton's conquest of Central Texas was complete. There farms averaged just under half of all improved acreage in the cash crop, but this could run as high as 55 percent in a top cotton-producing blackland county such as Hunt.² This transformation ended the independence of most rural people in Texas. The children of the plain folk entered into a new, permanent occupation as sharecroppers and tenants.

The U.S. Census first recorded farmers' land tenure status in 1880. That year two-thirds of East and Central Texas farmers owned their own land while thirty years later less than half did. In 1910 tenancy rates for the Central Texas counties averaged 58 percent and ran even higher

in cotton counties such as Hunt, where tenants comprised two-thirds of all farmers.³

Understanding this transformation of East and Central Texas clarifies social responses to that transformation. To that end, this chapter traces changes in four aspects of the region's economy between 1870 and 1910: population growth, farm values and size, crop and stock production, and tenancy rates among farmers. The demise of self-sufficient production, the dominance of cotton, and the triumph of tenancy over landownership are the most critical features of this story.

Even after the triumph of cotton, landowning farmers continued to seek a middle route between cash cropping and subsistence production. These farmers chose to produce for their families and the local marketplace first and for the international cotton market second, or not at all. Those who worked someone else's land, however, had no such choice. Landlords had no financial incentive to allow diversified subsistence crop and livestock operations on high-priced acres whose market value, after all, derived from their ability to produce cotton.

Residents in the eighty-three counties nearly quadrupled between 1870 and 1910 from a little over 600,000 to 2.4 million. Those latter numbers included the populations of five growing cities (Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and Waco), which, even in 1910, claimed only 12 percent of the area's people. The vast majority lived in rural communities or small towns. The forty-three Central Texas counties were already more populous in 1870 than their forty counterparts to the east. Although comprised of older settlements, the forty East Texas counties could boast only 280,584 residents in 1870 compared to 350,509 in the forty-three Central Texas counties. By 1910 the disparity had grown with East Texans outnumbered 901,353 to 1.5 million in the cotton counties of Central Texas.

In late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Texas, farmers were not just one economic interest group among many. Their story—in many ways—is the story of the people. By 1900 farmers still claimed nearly two-thirds of the population. Even those who were not farming lived in proximity to the farm. In 1910 just over three-fourths of all Texans and over 80 percent of Hunt County residents lived in rural places.⁴

Culturally the eighty-three counties were mainly southern. Not only did the majority come from the American South, a significant minority were also African American, a southern group scarcely present in the rest of the state. In 1870 some 208,559 blacks lived in the eighty-three-county region; by 1910 this number had grown to 567,166. Although more



numerous, African Americans' relative population position declined because of the postwar decades of nearly all-white migration. In 1870 the eighty-three counties had a black population of 33 percent compared to a statewide black population of 31 percent. In 1910, the percentage of blacks had fallen dramatically everywhere but least in the eastern third, which retained a black population of 25 percent compared to 18 percent statewide.

On the other hand, during the forty years in question relatively few Hispanics lived in the region as a whole. According to one estimate, in 1887 Tejanos and Mexican Americans comprised 4.1 percent of the population statewide, with most living in the southernmost counties along the Rio Grande or in the South Central counties near San Antonio. The instability of the Mexican Revolutions of the 1910s increased the Mexican population in Texas considerably, although the majority remained in South or South Central Texas until after 1920. By 1930 12 percent of Texans were of Mexican descent, but, according to the leading Texas

historical demographer, “almost no spatial overlap” existed between Hispanics and African Americans.⁵

Migrants pouring into Texas from the economically depressed South made the 1870s the critical growth decade in the region’s history. That decade the population of the eighty-three counties almost doubled with a growth of 86.6 percent. After that influx, the growth rates stayed in the thirties until 1900–10 when the population grew by only 12.6 percent.

Notably, black population growth rates followed the same upward trend. But despite high rates of population growth, the staggering influx of whites kept African Americans from making gains as a percentage of the total population. In the entire region—in East Texas proper, in the Central Texas counties, and in Hunt County—blacks’ relative position in the population declined after 1870. For example, in East Texas the 1870 black population averaged 37.9 percent by county but dropped to 31.1 percent in 1910. Blacks’ share of the Central Texas population dropped nine points between 1870 and 1910 to 20.1 percent. In Hunt County African Americans’ relative position held more stable in the long run. From a high of 10.5 percent in 1870, black Hunt County residents lost ground to incoming whites the very next decade before climbing back to within one percentage point of their 1870 level at the end of the period.

In summary, the population of the eastern third of Texas grew dramatically between 1870 and 1910. Central Texas grew most swiftly with 1870–80 growth rates for whites at 141.8 percent. In the beginning of the period, white growth rates far outstripped that of blacks, sometimes by nearly three to one. But by the end of the four decades, with immigration at a standstill, white growth slowed precipitously to the level of that for blacks. Notwithstanding this development, blacks’ share of the total population for the entire region fell during the forty years from a third to a quarter of the population.

People pressed relentlessly on the supply of land, thickening eastern Texas’ population density from ten people per square mile in 1870 to 36 in 1910.⁶ This population explosion fueled demand for farms, sending the price of land spiraling upward accompanied by steadily increasing tenancy rates. Rising land prices made land speculation attractive to those with liquid incomes and access to credit. Once landownership began to accrue to this segment of the population, security-first production was finished. Landlords directed tenants to grow more cotton and less food. The less food produced per farm, the more critically dependent farmers became on the moneymaking function of cotton. The following

quantitative evidence graphically illustrates how and why independence ended for the majority of the Texas plain folk.

The demise of subsistence production and the triumph of cotton are manifested in the details of farm output in the eastern third of Texas, 1870–1910. Specialization in cotton grew along with higher land prices, shrinking farm sizes, increasing acres devoted to cotton, and more bales of cotton per farm. Increasing tenancy accompanied increased cotton specialization; indeed, increasing tenancy and increasing cotton production were the twin symptoms of the same underlying factor—increasing concentration of land ownership. Declining self-sufficiency, on the other hand, can be seen in the falling numbers of hogs and milk cows per farm, the diminished relative value of all livestock, and the shrinking amount of sweet potatoes produced per farm.

Between 1870 and 1910, farm values tripled while farm sizes shrank by roughly the same amount. That is, in 1870 farm values in the eastern third of Texas averaged \$918.45 while farm size averaged 317.3 acres. By 1910 the average farm value had shot up to \$2,919.63 while the average size dropped to 104.2 acres. Differences show between East and Central Texas, however. During the 1870s the East Texas average farm size (385.7 acres) shrank by more than half and thereafter gradually declined to 93 acres in 1910. Central Texas farms experienced this same trend, if not so dramatically, going from 261 acres to 120 acres in 1910. Hunt County's experience reflects that of the cotton counties with a significant drop in farm size early on, followed by a steady decline to well below even the Central Texas average at 78.2 acres in 1910. This was a result of land prices.

Land prices soared. For the whole region the price per acre rose from \$2.89 in 1870 to \$28.02 in 1910. It is easy to see why investors saw farmland as the best investment in Texas. Farmland doubled in value every decade except for the depression-plagued 1890s. This dramatic increase in land prices is the key to understanding the yeomanry's loss. Widespread ownership of relatively inexpensive land had been the one essential ingredient in their way of life. Once its value (based on its ability to produce cotton, a commercial specialization made possible by the arrival of the railroads) made it attractive to investors, young farm couples found they could no longer compete for ownership of the means of an erstwhile subsistence production. At the end of this period land prices soared out of sight of the typical plain folk family. By 1914 one blackland county saw farms selling for an average of just under \$60 per acre with the best going for \$150 per acre. In a market of fluctuating cotton prices,

a farmer could not hold such land long enough for it to pay for itself along with interest, production costs, and a living for the farm family.⁷

Counties best suited for cotton production by soil and location near railroads saw the earliest and most abrupt changes. In 1870, before the coming of the railroads, the self-sufficient farms of Hunt County produced only four thousand bales of cotton at the rate of just fewer than three bales per farm. Farmland averaged \$3.31 per acre. In 1910, however, Hunt County produced over sixty-five thousand bales at the rate of over eleven bales per farm (high even by blackland standards). Even more remarkably, farmers produced those eleven bales on farms averaging half the size of the 1870 three-bale farms. Hunt County farmland had skyrocketed to an average valuation of \$40.65 an acre by 1910.⁸

And that particular development forced the fundamental re-ordering of the yeoman economy of Texas. The following shows the great contrast between the semi-subsistence, semi-commercial economy of the landowning rural majority in 1870 and the single-minded cotton economy of landlords and tenants a generation later in 1910.

In 1870 less than a fifth of farmland in eastern Texas had been "improved" (cleared, plowed, and/or fenced). Farmers still practiced a style of production that did not demand the same intensive land utilization required by cash cropping and that was intensified by population growth and decreases in farm size. By 1890 the census reported about half of the farmland improved. The depressions of the 1890s slightly reversed the trend, but by 1910 the 1890 level had been reached again.

The ever-increasing portion of improved acreage devoted to cotton demonstrates the link between improved land and cotton specialization. Farmers increased the portion of their improved acreage in cotton by about 55 percent between 1880 (the first year the U.S. Census gathered this data) and 1910. In the blacklands farmers doubled their improved acreage in cotton, and Hunt County increased cotton's share by 191.5 percent. In fact, these figures fail to show the real impact of cotton across the eighty-three counties because the tremendous increase in the total number of improved acres hid the degree to which an historic shift in production had occurred. Between 1880 and 1910, cotton's share of total farmland (improved and unimproved) in the eastern third of Texas increased 118.5 percent. In Central Texas cotton increased 149.5 percent while in East Texas the amount did not quite double. In Hunt County it rose five times. This massive increase in land used for cotton could hardly occur without corresponding adjustments in subsistence production.

One such adjustment occurred in the curtailment of hog production on Texas farms. Because of the central place of pork in rural people's diet, average number of hogs per farm measures, in part, the degree of remaining self-sufficiency. The eighty-three-county region saw a clear trend away from hog production. While hogs increased in absolute numbers, they did not keep pace with the growing number of people and farms. Between 1870 and 1910 the supply of hogs per person halved, falling from about two in 1870 to about one hog per person in 1910 in a steady and unbroken decline. Again, there were significant subregional differences between Central and East Texas with hogs persisting longer in the east. Not until 1890 did East Texas' hogs-to-people ratios begin to decline. Even in 1890 East Texas remained closer to the old standards of self-sufficiency than elsewhere. Not surprisingly, 1910 found the Central cotton counties with about half the ratio of hogs per person as East Texas.

Hunt County illustrates what happened to blackland counties generally. In 1870 Hunt out-produced even the East Texas county average of hogs per person, and that continued through 1880. The 1880s, however, saw the first drop in hogs relative to the population as a result of four related factors. First, Hunt County residents increased the portion of their farmland planted in cotton by 158.5 percent. Also, the county's population increased 90.0 percent. Third, demonstrating the new dominance of cotton culture, in 1887 Hunt County enacted a fence law mandating the confinement of hogs and cattle, thus eradicating the long-practiced custom of common free-range grazing rights whereby even poor people and tenants could supply their families with meat. Finally and decisively, the Hunt County tenancy rate increased sharply over the decade from one-third to nearly one-half. The 1880s in Hunt County proved to be the divide between the old self-sufficiency and the new commercial cotton economy. In that decade alone, Hunt County's hogs per farm declined from almost 15 to just less than 7. In the eighty-three-county region over the whole period, hogs per farm dropped from 22.8 in 1870 to 8 hogs per farm forty years later; in Hunt County the drop was from 15 to 3. Similar subsistence declines followed, including sweet potato production.

During his famous antebellum tour of Texas, Frederick Law Olmsted developed an intimate acquaintance with the sweet potato. In fact, compared to the fried pork so offensive to his palate, he gradually came to tolerate this ubiquitous staple. Indeed, sweet potatoes comprised an essential feature of the southern rural poor majority's table. This earthy

vegetable required only a minuscule amount of acreage, yet it could supply much nutrition to the poorest farm families almost year-round. A one-acre potato patch produced, on the average, seventy bushels region-wide. If stored properly, sweet potatoes kept well throughout most of the year, and one acre to half an acre would produce as many sweet potatoes as the typical family could consume. In case of surpluses, farmers fed them to the hogs and traded or sold them in town.

Sweet potato production fell disastrously during the forty-year period. As usual, East Texas fell the least, but over the whole region farms went from thirty-seven to twelve bushels per farm. Hunt County certainly led the plunge with an average twenty-one bushels in 1870 to one bushel in 1910.

During the 1870s and 1880s East Texas farms did out-produce their counterparts in Central Texas. But, notwithstanding the dense soil, Central Texas blackland farmers still managed an average twenty-seven bushels of sweet potatoes per farm in 1870, giving lie to the common assertion heard forty years later that the blacklands *could* not produce sweet potatoes. Eventually the blacklands *did* not, in fact, produce much in the way of sweet potatoes. By 1910 the Central Texas counties produced an eighth of its previous level of production, or only about three bushels per farm. In reality most 1910 blackland tenants and sharecroppers probably grew no sweet potatoes at all while farm owners continued to produce them as before. While the dense blackland soils were not the best for sweet potatoes, they could be grown there. Ownership of the land, not its consistency, made the difference.

The experience of two counties illustrates this point. In 1910 blackland Hunt County produced on the average one bushel of sweet potatoes per farm while East Texas' Trinity County produced 28.2 bushels per farm. Yet, yield was not significantly less on the blackland. Hunt County residents got 66.6 bushels of sweet potatoes per acre in 1910 while farmers in Trinity County got 76.7. Why then did Hunt County farmers produce 27 times fewer bushels per farm than did Trinity County farmers? Hunt County possessed one of the highest tenancy rates in the state at 67.5 percent while at 40.5 percent Trinity County's was one of the lowest. In 1890, at a 48.0 percent tenancy rate, Hunt County had turned out 19.3 bushels of sweet potatoes per farm, or 1,654.5 percent more than in 1910, in spite of the county's dense black clay.

Certainly nobody made the argument that the blacklands were somehow unsuited for milk cows. But the trend away from self-sufficiency appeared in the rate of milk cows per person and per farm as well, es-

pecially on the high tenancy blackland. Hunt County's milk cows per person ratio declined from one cow per person in 1870 to one for every six persons in 1910. Milk cows required land for pasture and forage, taking away valuable acres from the money crop.

For the eighty-three counties the average number of milk cows per farm fell from just under seven in 1870 to just over two in 1910. Again, no significant differences appeared between the East Texas counties and the blackland cotton counties. Both subregions started the period with between six and seven milk cows per farm; at the end of the era both subregions averaged just over two milk cows. Hunt County experienced a tremendous decline with an 1870 average of about six milk cows per farm before slipping down to the 1910 level of only about one milk cow per farm.

Corn was neutral in the war between self-sufficiency and cotton. Tenants and owners, subsistence and commercial farmers had to grow corn to power their plow animals. Used for both food and feed, corn comprised the most important crop before the rise of cotton; as cotton production gained, corn production had to meet the increased needs of the horses and mules essential for cotton farming. Thus, corn production remained more stable throughout the period. But in testimony to the decreasing size of farms, production per farm in 1910 averaged just over half the 1870 level. Interestingly, the percentage of decline (47 percent) in bushels of corn per farm from 1870 through 1910 was the same for the entire region.

Self-sufficient production declined generally across the entire region, as is summed up in the plummeting numbers of hogs, sweet potatoes, and milk cows per farm. Subsistence production declined most drastically, however, in the blackland cotton counties and persisted most stubbornly in East Texas.

Between 1880 and 1910 farmland devoted to cotton in the eighty-three counties more than doubled. Moreover, the rate of increase was steady if unspectacular. At first glance, it may seem surprising that even at the height of cotton's dominance that only about a fifth of farm acreage was in cotton. This is misleading. The term farm acreage took into account *all* acres within the boundaries of a farm including woodlands, creeks, pasture, fields of other crops, garden plots and marginal land. Again, the crucial change came in the 1880s when the arrival of railroads accompanied a 51.0 percent jump in farmland devoted to cotton.

Railroads brought on the great transformation in four ways. First, railroads made specialization in cotton possible. After all, the crop had

no local value. Second, the arrival of the cotton market via the railroad made farmland an attractive investment, which pushed up land prices. Third, linkage by rail to manufacturing-commercial centers eased both the delivery of and stimulated a market for manufactured goods, leading to a heightened interest in making “cash money.” Unlike local economies’ use of various media of exchange, the outside world recognized only cash. And, finally, railroads further stimulated cotton production by bringing into Texas an influx of potential tenants from the rest of the South.

East Texas, Central Texas, and Hunt County each manifested distinct levels of commitment to cotton. Even in 1910 East Texas devoted less than fifteen acres out of a hundred to cotton, and in the forty-three Central Texas counties the crop took up just over a quarter of all farmland. In the most productive blackland counties, however, cotton claimed much higher levels. Hunt County farmers used 41.0 percent of all farmland for cotton. Thirty years earlier when such data was first collected, little variation existed between the two main subregions; only two percentage points separated their rates of commitment to cotton in 1880. But, while East Texas’ involvement with cotton increased gradually after 1880, the Central Texas counties’ production of cotton increased rapidly until such counties were devoting 73.7 percent more of their farmland to cotton than East Texas. As in other measures, Hunt County began the era in line with East Texas, but the 1880s witnessed a 158.5 percent increase. By 1910 cotton registered a 400 percent increase over its 1880 level. But since these figures measure cotton acreage against total farm acreage per county, they tend to obscure cotton’s real preeminence.

The rising percentage of “improved” farmland devoted to cotton more accurately depicts the region’s growing marriage to cotton. This measure eliminates woodlands and farm acres neither fenced nor plowed. For the entire eighty-three-county region improved acreage in cotton climbed from 25.6 percent in 1880 to 39.6 percent in 1910. Significant subregional differences appear, as might be expected. Cotton’s share of improved farmland in East Texas remained remarkably stable through the period. In 1880 East Texas put just under a third of improved farmland in cotton and in 1910 those forty counties still devoted less than a third to the staple. The Central Texas counties experienced a strikingly different pattern. In 1880 they devoted less than a quarter of improved land to cotton, and in 1910 nearly one-half was in cotton production, an increase of over one hundred percent between 1880 and 1910.

Hunt County’s relationship to cotton typified the period for the top

cotton producing counties on the rich blackland. Hunt began the era with less improved farm acres in cotton than even the East Texas counties. But the county had been organized for just forty years, and settlers only then began filling the prairie. Transporting cotton to the nearest rail line or river port diminished the crop's profitability. Besides, as described earlier by Mollie McWhorter, the sparsely settled but socially tight-knit communities were otherwise occupied with producing for their own use.

The coming decade changed that. The arrival of a number of railroads in Hunt County carried both cotton buyers and cotton growers. In 1880 farmers put less than twenty percent of Hunt County's improved farmland in cotton; 1890 saw a dramatic increase to 30.7 percent. However, in spite of the presence of railroads and the whole cotton-marketing infrastructure, 1890 Hunt County farmers (still mostly owners) put less than a third of their improved acreage into cotton. The next decade produced another sharp rise to the level of 43.2 percent improved acres in cotton in a county with what was now a majority tenant farmer population. By 1910 well over one-half of the county's improved farmland was in cotton; the 1910 level of 55.4 percent represented a forty-year doubling of the portion of Hunt County's improved acres devoted to growing cotton. Not until over two-thirds of the county's farmers worked for landlords, however, did this final commitment occur.

Cotton production even managed to outpace the tremendous population surge between 1870 and 1910. In 1870 the eastern third of Texas produced 290,303 bales of cotton, or just less than half a bale per person. In 1910 those same counties produced over five times as much cotton (1,709,609 bales) and still stayed ahead of the population boom at .71 bales per person. East Texas entered the period producing about half a bale per person and ended the period at about the same rate of production. Central Texas, on the other hand, doubled its bales per person ratio, going from .45 bales per person in 1870 to .91 bales in 1910. As with other features of its economy, Hunt County began the 1870s well in line with East Texas but ended the period as a leading exemplar of Central Texas cotton specialization at about a bale and a third per person. Hunt County's bales to people output increased 234.1 percent over the forty years. To get a better view of what farmers were actually producing, it is necessary to shift the focus to the farm.

Like the population, the number of farms also shot up between 1870 and 1910. In 1870 the eighty-three counties averaged only 701 farms each; by 1910 those same counties averaged 3,351 farms. From the be-

ginning the Central Texas counties led East Texas counties in this category. Compare Hunt County's nearly six thousand farms to the East Texas average of less than three thousand in 1910. The blackland prairie drew more people even before the coming of cotton because of richer soil and fewer trees (unlike East Texas whose great forests only grudgingly yielded cultivable acres to back-breaking effort and reclaimed those acres at the slightest opportunity). Central Texas also drew farmers convinced by real estate boomers' assertions that farmers could make a better living on the blackland by accident than by great effort on the sandyland. Across the whole region the average number of farms per county rose 378.0 percent between 1870 and 1910, an important factor to keep in mind when examining increasing cotton production.

If anything, measuring bales of cotton produced per farm diminishes the actual huge increase that occurred at the end of this period. For example, the 6.1 bales per farm average for the entire region in 1870 represented an average total county output of 4,276 bales; in 1910, while producing only 5.5 bales per farm, the average county harvested 18,431 bales of cotton. This reduced ratio of bales to farms resulted solely from the tremendous growth in numbers of farms and huge decreases in their size. Both subregions began the period very close in per farm output with long-settled East Texas slightly out-producing Central Texas. But in 1910 East Texas produced an average of 3.4 bales per farm while the Central cotton counties produced over twice that. Even in East Texas the total number of farms had grown, so the bales-per-farm ratio obscures the real growth in levels of cotton production.

Judging only by per farm output, Hunt County increased its cotton production 297 percent between 1870 and 1910. In total number of bales, however, Hunt County produced 1,472 percent more cotton in 1910 than in 1870. This leap in production accompanied only a 297 percent increase in the number of farms. The point of this blizzard of numbers is that increased cotton production cannot be accounted for in the increase in number of farms alone. Instead, the mission and output of individual farms changed along with changing patterns of ownership. Hunt County farms of the 1870s devoted less than 20 percent of improved acreage to cotton. By 1910, however, Hunt County farmers put well over half of such acres in cotton. The difference, in large part, lay in who owned the land.

Tenancy refers to landlessness among farmers and the practice of farming another's land. This venerable term covered several distinct modes of land renting in the turn-of-the-century South. "Tenancy,"

however, was only occasionally used by Texans other than journalists and other professionals. More often than not, the rural majority, including tenants, referred to renters' tenure by their specific relationship to the land and landowner. The closest thing in everyday speech to a general label for landless farmers was "renters" or "cotton renters." While in common usage in Texas in 1910, it is unsatisfactory here due to its confusion with "cash renter," only one of the three levels among tenants. Tenantry, a rare term then that has since fallen into obsolescence, referred collectively to the tenants themselves.

There had been tenant farmers in East and Central Texas since the earliest days of English-speaking settlements. In the South tenant farming was an ordinary and accepted condition for young white farm couples and after Emancipation had become the majority position of African American farmers. In fact, not until the 1880 census did the government inquire into the tenure status of farmers, an acknowledgement of the growth of tenancy among the South's white and black populations.

Blacks' and whites' consciousness of tenancy diverged significantly. Freedmen across the South fought for the adoption of sharecropping as an alternative to the planters' desired continuation of the old gang method of fieldwork. Sharecropping gave more autonomy than supervised gang labor, and freedmen rightly viewed its adoption as a victory for individual liberty and, perhaps, a first step up the agricultural ladder. Whites, on the other hand, viewed tenancy as an acceptable condition only for young people. Land ownership was a badge of independent, mature manhood. Both black and white rural southerners apprehended the relationship between landownership and liberty, and desire for land sprang both from their common agrarian culture and from a common-sense understanding of economic reality.

Both the number and incidence of tenant farmers in the eastern third of Texas increased dramatically over the forty years until they became the majority of all farmers. The development of a landless majority signaled a profound qualitative change in the plain folk way of life. In 1880 just over a third of farmers in the eighty-three counties had been without their own land. Their percentages steadily increased until tenants became the majority class in the eighty-three-county region in 1900 and in the whole state in 1910. Both East and Central Texas began the era remarkably similar in tenancy rates, even though the Central Texas counties were already slightly ahead. By 1890 the differences in the two subregions manifested themselves in the widest gap that appeared in their rates of landlessness. East Texas counties averaged a tenancy rate

of 35.1 percent, almost unchanged (in fact somewhat lower) from the previous ten years. Already, however, the Central Texas cotton counties had a tenancy rate of nearly half of all farmers at 48.1 percent. The contrast between the two subregions now sharpened. While security-first agriculture persisted longer in East Texas, after 1890 the East Texas tenancy rate began to curve upward, and by 1910 those forty counties averaged 46.2 percent. On the other hand, the Central Texas counties' 1910 tenancy rates averaged 57.8 percent. The counties with the most fertile (high-priced) soil saw even higher rates. While the landless comprised less than a third of 1870 farmers in Hunt County, forty years later they made up over two-thirds.

Black farmers were more likely to be landless than whites. Paradoxically, however, the total number of landowning African American farmers increased dramatically between 1870 and 1910. In both 1900 and 1910 about a fifth of farmers in the eighty-three-county region were black (21.7 percent in 1910). In 1910 there were considerable differences, however, between East and Central Texas in this regard. In East Texas 29.6 percent of all farmers were black compared to 16.3 percent in Central Texas and 5.0 percent in Hunt County. In 1910 the tenancy rate for black farmers in the entire region was 67.5 percent compared to 47.4 percent for whites. Between the two subregions, however, there existed strikingly clear differences regarding tenancy and race. Tenancy rates were higher for both blacks and whites in Central Texas, but that is only half the story. East Texas counties' tenancy rates averaged only 39.4 percent for white farmers but 60.3 for blacks. In the cotton counties the county tenancy rates rose to 74.5 for blacks but also increased to an average 54.9 percent for whites. Hunt's 1910 tenancy rates were 67.0 percent for whites and 77.9 percent for blacks.

Across Texas and the Lower South as a whole, however, the total number of black landowning farmers increased during this period. As historian Loren Schweninger has shown, ex-slaves and their children wanted to own land both because they "respected the land and its bounty" and because they "saw land ownership as a symbol of freedom." According to Schweninger's figures, just over eight hundred black Texas farmers owned their own land in 1870 while 12,513 did so in 1890. By 1910, 21,182 black Texas farmers were land owners. African Americans lived precarious lives under the reign of white supremacy, and many of these landowning farmers sought security within black "freedom colonies" such as Hunt County's Center Point and Neylandville.⁹

Among tenants three distinct gradations of status and autonomy pre-

vailed. Cash renters, a fraction of the total number of tenants, leased land for a designated (sometimes pre-paid) cash sum and retained complete freedom to do with it as they chose. This afforded the ultimate in self-direction, risk, and profit for the tenant farmer. During 1870–1910 the percentage of all farmers in this group never rose above the 1910 level of 8.7 percent for the region. In 1910 Hunt County, only 2.3 percent of farmers paid cash rent. Below the cash renter in status and independence were share tenants. These farmers rented land by paying a portion of the cotton and corn harvests to the owner. Under this general label, however, there existed two quite distinct levels of status and control. First, farmers who possessed everything needed to make a crop (team, implements, and credit) except land customarily paid a third of the corn and a fourth of the cotton to the landlord. The main difference between “thirds and fourths” tenants and cash renters was that in the former arrangement landlords had an obvious interest in and authority over land use. At the bottom of the tenancy ladder were those without any of the means of production except labor. These tenants looked to their landlord to supply the team, tools, and other accouterments of farming. These farmers were said to “work on the halves” with half the cotton and corn going to the landlord. Besides the amount of the crop going to the landlord, another crucial distinction separated “thirds and fourths” renters from half croppers: control of the crop. The thirds and fourths tenant owned the crop and marketed it and paid the landlord. The landlord, on the other hand, owned the crop of those working on the halves, marketed it, and paid the sharecropper. Of course, by harvest time the sharecroppers’ half of the crop tended to be owned by someone else due to the crop-lien system whereby the tenant lived on credit secured by his half of the crop. Further, white supremacy ensured that the dividing lines described above were not always straight. Historians of the South have shown that while landlords allowed white half-croppers to mortgage their half of the crop to credit merchants, they typically denied access to outside credit to black farmers, preferring to handle the profitable credit arrangements themselves.¹⁰ Unfortunately for future historians, the census failed to distinguish between levels of share renting.

Tenancy and cotton production went hand-in-hand. While the rate of increase in all share renting for the entire region was substantial (32.5 percent in 1880, 43.5 percent in 1910), the difference between the two subregions points to share renting as an allied feature of cotton production. Share renting in East Texas rose from 29.0 percent in 1880 to

38.3 percent in 1910. On the other hand, share renting in Central Texas rose from 31.9 percent in 1880 to 48.3 percent in 1910.

In 1880 Hunt County remained true to its early adherence to East Texas trends but then rapidly made up for lost time. This top-ten cotton county achieved a share renter majority by 1900, and by 1910 65.2 percent of its farmers were share renters. At least on the blacklands, the conquest of the rural majority's independence was complete by 1910. The remaining semi-subsistence, semi-commercial farmers in East Texas hung on to their land by virtue of the very poverty of the soil (at least in cotton production) and a way of life based on denying themselves things that it took money to buy.

By 1910 the eastern third of Texas had matured economically into two similar yet distinct subregions. In most Central Texas counties cotton production supplied the basis for the economy. Everything economic, both in town and country, centered upon the financing, planting, cultivating, harvesting, ginning, marketing, and transportation of cotton. In East Texas cotton was also a dominant economic concern, but with the important difference that a small landowner majority persisted here longer than in the cotton counties. As a result, these counties plunged less deeply into cotton than the landlord-directed share tenants on the blackland.

Cotton production and self-sufficient culture did not easily coexist. This can be illustrated by comparing the occurrence or incidence of subsistence variables (hogs, sweet potatoes, and milk cows) with cotton variables (bales of cotton, acres in cotton, and tenancy) across the eastern third of Texas in 1910.

Where sweet potatoes flourished, so too did hogs. Most security-first variables possessed positive correlations with each other; two of them (hogs and sweet potatoes) had very strong positive correlations with the other. Counties averaging less than four hogs per farm also averaged less than four bushels of sweet potatoes while counties averaging six hogs or more per farm also averaged nearly 26 bushels of sweet potatoes, thus producing an extraordinarily high coefficient of determination between the two ($R^2 = .9141$ shows that variations in one account for 91.4 percent of changes in the other). Of course, hogs did not cause sweet potato production, nor vice versa. Instead, as will be seen, the tight fit between these two factors show that they flourished together where landownership was highest, where the plain folk were still in charge of their own production decisions.

On the other hand, cotton production and tenancy went hand-in-

hand. Percentage of all farmland in cotton, bales of cotton produced per farm, and tenancy rates all bore strong positive relationships to each other. In fact, the coefficient of determination for percentage of land in cotton and tenancy rates ($R^2 = .73$) affirms the powerful role each played in the other's development: changes in tenancy rates accounts for 73 percent of the changes in percentage of land in cotton. If soil type played the decisive factor and not ownership of the soil, then cotton yield (bales per acre) should manifest a higher correlation to percentage of land in cotton than tenancy. That was not the case. Cotton yield per acre and percentage of land in cotton possessed a correlation coefficient of just .2918, for a correlation of determination of .0851. In other words, variations in the soil's cotton yield per acre accounted for less than nine percent of the variation in the percentage of land in cotton across the eighty-three counties in 1910. This figure gets us closer to identifying the determinative cause: Cotton did not squeeze out hogs, sweet potatoes, and milk cows; landlords did.

Landlord-directed farming led to intensified land use out of line with customary modes of production. This can be measured in the census category "improved land," land which had been cleared, plowed, or fenced. Left to their own devices, landowning farmers did not tie up a majority of their improved land in cotton. When the majority of farmers in a county owned their farms and, thus, made their own production decisions, the average percentage of improved land in cotton remained around one third. Only in the high tenancy counties did cotton command half the improved acreage.

In fact, ownership of the soil was more important than that soil's yield per acre in explaining degree of commitment to cotton. Counties with fertile soil for cotton and low or moderate tenancy rates lagged behind the high percentages of land in cotton and bales per farm characteristic of the high tenancy counties. Over time more marginal acres were conscripted into the service of cotton, especially in Central Texas counties. That belies a natural productivity argument, suggesting instead the authority of landlords unconcerned about diminishing returns on tenant labor and greater dependence on the credit merchant, and more concerned with total output.

But what of the statistical relationship between subsistence and cotton? If self-sufficiency and cotton were indeed in conflict with each other, then strong negative statistical relationships should exist between the two sets of variables. Indeed, such was the case. Subsistence variables and cotton/tenancy variables tended to bear strong and negative

relationships with each other. That is, where cotton and tenancy flourished, self-sufficiency faltered. Second, these data demonstrate one of the many consequences of the loss of independence. Comparing subsistence variables to tenancy rates shows that in fact tenants were not able to pursue even a middle ground between self-sufficiency and commercial specialization. Certainly some obstacle worked against milk cow ownership in the 1910 Central Texas cotton counties. That obstacle was lack of control over land use by tenant farmers. The average number of milk cows per farm and the county rates of share renting (as opposed to cash renting) bore a strong and negative correlation. In the counties where farms averaged less than two milk cows, the share renting rate was well over one-half of all farmers. In the counties where farms averaged three or more milk cows, the share renting averaged a quarter of all farmers.

Like the number of milk cows per farm, the proportion of acreage devoted to sweet potatoes shrank as tenancy increased. The most striking thing about the percentage of improved land in sweet potatoes was that no matter what the year or tenancy rate, sweet potatoes took up only a minuscule portion of the total acreage, never more than 7 percent. That is not to say, however, that there were no significant variations associated with tenancy. Clearly there were. As tenancy rates increased, the percentage of improved land devoted to sweet potatoes decreased. In counties with less than 40 percent tenancy, nearly 3 percent of improved land was in sweet potatoes. On the other hand, when between 60 and 70 percent of farmers worked somebody else's land, sweet potatoes claimed less than one-hundredth of one percent of improved acreage in sweet potatoes.

In the counties where 60 percent or more farmers still owned their own farms (and, thus, were still in control of production choices), farms produced an average of over fifty-five bushels of sweet potatoes each in 1910. Counties where 60 percent or more of the farmers were tenants (and, thus, landlords controlled production choices), farms averaged only three bushels of sweet potatoes per farm. Some claimed that the consistency of the soil itself in the blacklands where tenancy was highest prevented sweet potato production. Among the three dozen rural nonagenarians interviewed for this work, seven grew up on exclusively blackland farms. Of these, only two (both children of sharecroppers) asserted that the blackland could not produce sweet potatoes. Four of the other blacklanders, including two owners' children, stated that their families regularly grew sweet potatoes on their blackland farms

as part of their sustenance. Those who retained the right to make their own land-use decisions were indeed able to raise sweet potatoes on the blackland prairie.

The rate of landownership versus tenancy composed the single most important factor in explaining production choices. In counties where fewer farmers controlled their own production choices, security-first production lagged, and in counties where a majority of farmers still owned their own land, security-first production flourished.

Imagine the transformation these bits of 1910 data represented from the perspective of an adult old enough to recall the 1870s. The Hunt County of his or her childhood had a population of 9,213 compared to 43,531 in 1910. The average farm halved in size, dropped in number of hogs by 373 percent, decreased in number of milk cows by 500 percent, and shrunk in bushels of sweet potatoes by 2,000 percent. At the same time the percentage of all farmland in cotton increased 400 percent, bales of cotton per farm shot up 283 percent, tenancy rose 115 percent, and, most devastating of all, farmers share renting or cropping increased 130 percent. All the other changes, wrenching as they might have been, pale in comparison to the rise of landlessness among the farming population.

In the beginning of this era the rural majority in the eastern third of Texas accepted tenancy as a reality that always befell somebody else (the very young, freedmen). Those who began farming on rented land confidently expected that over time and through perseverance and effort they, too, would join the ranks of the landowning class from which they had come. Within a single generation, however, tenancy and sharecropping became a permanent status for the rural poor majority, black and white. For this rural people, the conquest of their region by cotton made the poor poorer, more dependent, and more numerous.

» CHAPTER 3 «

FARMERS AND WEALTH DISTRIBUTION IN HUNT COUNTY, TEXAS, 1870–1910

More Texas farmers faced a bleak outlook in 1910 than had their class forty years earlier in the aftermath of the Civil War. More owned no property and had less control over their lives. Data in county tax rolls and federal manuscript censuses recorded the meaning of economic trends for individual farm families. This chapter, which looks at Hunt County, explores three topics in detail: wealth distribution, wealth composition, and household social characteristics. Together, these windows into the past provide glimpses of the conflict between self-sufficiency and cotton and the declining opportunity for independence.

During 1870–1910 the rich got richer while the poor got poorer and more numerous. The proportion of all families who owned no property increased six times between 1870 and 1910; among whites it increased ten times. Concurrently, components of family-held wealth shifted away from the accouterments of self-sufficiency and reflected the growing dominance of cotton. And, finally, landlessness among middle-aged farmers rose dramatically, mocking the optimistic pronouncements of New South proponents of the “agricultural ladder.”

Hunt County experienced a huge leap in levels of household wealth concentration between 1870 and 1880. Yet after 1880, in spite of a downward redistribution over the next three decades, the pre-cotton 1870 level of wealth distribution was not regained. The simplest way to express the degree to which a given population’s wealth is (or is not) concentrated is

the Gini coefficient, a relative measure useful for comparative purposes.¹ In 1870 the Gini coefficient for Hunt County was .59; in 1910 the Gini coefficient had risen to .67.² The year 1880 marked the highest level of wealth concentration as measured by the Gini coefficient at .72. Thereafter, the degree of concentration gradually decreased until 1910 where it (at .67) remained considerably higher than in 1870. By comparison, Gavin Wright reports the 1860 estimate of wealth concentration for the “Cotton South” at .73; in the Midwest it was .53.³

The Gini coefficient, however, is only a rough measure of wealth concentration. During the period 1870–1910 the richest 30 percent of Hunt County residents gained while the poorest 70 percent lost ground. There occurred some downward redistribution in shares of wealth from the top, but this was restricted to the wealthiest 30 percent. By 1910 the richest 30 percent owned about 83 percent of all household wealth. Those in the poorest 70 percent experienced some up-and-down movement but were net losers over the forty-year period.

Overall the wealthiest tenth enjoyed a net increase in its share of the county's wealth over the forty-year period. In 1870 the wealthiest ten percent owned 47.4 percent of the county's family-held property while in 1910 their share was 52.2 percent. Nevertheless, this 1910 showing was down from an 1880 high of 61.6 percent, which then gradually decreased to the 1910 level. In spite of some decline, however, in 1910 the wealthiest tenth among Hunt Countians owned over half of the county's household property.⁴

The second wealthiest tenth had the opposite experience. In 1880 this decile's share of the wealth actually dropped to the lowest level of the forty-year period (15.6 percent) then consistently rose each decade to its 1910 level of 18.4 percent. The third decile followed nearly exactly the same trend as the second: sharply down from 1870 to 1880, and then increasing each decade to an all-time high of 12.1 percent in 1910. And there the increases ended. Each percentile below experienced net losses during 1870–1910.

The poorest 70 percent of Hunt County's families owned just over a quarter of the wealth in 1870; by 1910 they owned well under a fifth. Among the poor majority, as each category is shrunk down by removing its richest tenth, the relative loss of position in shares of wealth is greater. The poorest 60 percent lost 42.3 percent of its share of the wealth, the poorest half of the population lost 54.0 percent of its previous share when it dropped from owning 11.1 percent of all wealth to 5.1 percent. The forty percent at the bottom lost 61.8 percent of its share of the wealth,

and so on. The poor got poorer and the poorest lost the most ground.⁵ But these are measures of total wealth owned. How might the picture change if real estate were isolated? As expected from rising tenancy, a smaller portion of the population owned real estate in 1910 than in 1870.⁶ Those at the bottom fared worst. Further, the descent into real estate propertylessness was steeper and began higher up in the population. In 1870 the richest 30 percent of Hunt County's population owned nearly three-quarters of all the real estate; by 1910 their share had increased to 86.9 percent. Consequently, the poorest 70 percent sunk from owning 24.5 percent to 12.7 percent, a loss of nearly half of their 1870 share. Further, in 1870 the poorest *half* of the population owned 8.1 percent of all real estate while by 1910 their share had fallen to 1.1 percent. Over the years wealth trickled up and away from the lower ranks to those at the top. The bottom rank, which had begun the era owning only a little, ended it with nothing.

A thorough understanding of these changes demands more details about what had comprised household wealth and how that changed. An interesting feature of this data is the elevated average wealth for 1870 compared to 1880, 1890, and 1900. Mean wealth for the 1870 Hunt County sample population was \$1,446; the sample's average wealth did not reach this level again during the remaining forty years. Instead, the average wealth for 1880 dropped down to \$825 and there began a new trend with modest increases every year until the 1910 level of \$1,385. The explanation (beyond nationwide deflation and the depressions of the 1870s and 1890s, or the possibility of varying rates of accurate property appraisals by local tax collectors) is in the population jump, which began in the 1870s. The influx of propertyless people could easily have vitiated the county's average wealth as constituted in 1870 among the land-owning early settlers. Recall, also, the dramatic fall in farm sizes. At any rate, these figures show that among owners (those owning any property) the average value of household wealth, both personal and real property, nearly doubled between 1880 and 1910 in Hunt County. At the same time, and even more significantly, the propertylessness rate steadily increased from an 1870 low of just 2 percent to around 13 percent in 1910.

As a group, African Americans were considerably poorer than whites. Blacks' average household wealthholding rose from an 1880 low of \$28 to \$389 by 1910. In reality, most blacks were still desperately poor. There is an interesting disparity between overall average black wealth and wealthholding among those blacks who actually owned some per-

sonal or real property. The 1910 average black wealth overall was \$389 compared to \$612 among blacks who actually owned some property. Taken by themselves, white and black property owners were closer together in relative wealth than were the total population of whites and blacks, which included non-property owners. For example, while all blacks owned on the average 26.8 percent of white average wealth in 1910, when limited to owners only of both races, in 1910 black property owners' wealth was valued at 38 percent of the white average. The two most salient facts about black wealth remain clear: even among property owners, average black wealth was far below the county average, which created an economic as well as racial caste characterized by denial of opportunity, and a significant portion of blacks owned no real or personal property at all.

Between 1870 and 1910 the proportion of all Hunt Countians living without the ownership of any form of wealth or property increased over 500 percent. At the beginning of the period only two people out of a hundred owned nothing; by the end of the forty years thirteen people out of a hundred were so situated. For the county as a whole propertylessness increased 530 percent; for whites only it increased by 1,000 percent; for blacks the forty-year period saw their proportion of propertylessness *decrease* by 27.2 percent. Thus, the trend toward propertylessness cannot be explained in terms of "black poverty" after Emancipation. In 1870, surely the poorest year in the decadal census for the freedman population, only 2.0 percent of Hunt Countians owned no property whatsoever. Complete propertylessness that year indeed seemed a result of the poverty of only recently freed ex-slaves: only one percent of whites were in that condition compared to fully one-half of blacks who possessed no wealth. Thereafter the rate of propertylessness among Hunt Countians rose for both races until 1890 when 11.7 percent of whites and 58.3 percent of blacks owned nothing. Then, the trend dramatically altered: while the rate dropped for both races (most for blacks) in 1900, by 1910 the propertyless rate for blacks continued to fall while that for whites rose again. This showing by Hunt County African Americans followed a trend throughout the South reflecting the struggle—successful for a few—of black farmers to own their own land.⁷ Still, over a third of black households remained without any form of property. Even though blacks as a group were doing better than they had just after slavery, as a whole, white and black Hunt Countians saw the number of destitute people increase dramatically over the years that commercial cotton production fastened its grip on the region.

As noted, the concentration of real estate ownership followed the trend for all wealth. Here is a closer examination of real estate in terms of rural acreage (including farm buildings), town lots (including buildings), real estate's changing values and ranking in the composition of household wealth, and, finally, the percentage of households who owned real estate. The per acre tax valuation of Hunt County farmland increased over seven times between 1870 and 1910. Hunt County farmland averaged \$2.41 per acre in the 1870 tax roll sample; in 1910 that had risen to \$18.44. Likewise, the average value of holdings per owner had risen dramatically from the 1870 level of \$772 to the 1910 level of \$2,163. Furthermore, the \$772 in 1870 represented 320 acres compared to the 1910 level of \$2,163 representing only 117 acres of land. Land valuation rose 665.1 percent during the forty years. Of course, the real market value was much higher than the tax valuation. In 1910 Hunt County farms brought an average of \$33.68 per acre.⁸

The changing distribution and value of town real estate sheds indirect light on the farm economy and helps explain Hunt County's overall economic development.⁹ The average value of town lots and buildings rose by only 70.1 percent over the forty-year period. That is, the average worth of a town lot went from \$498 in 1870 to \$847 in 1910. The average value of town properties per owner actually underwent a marked decrease (–35.5 percent) due to the wider distribution of town property over time. In 1870 town property owners averaged four town lots each; by 1910 this had fallen to an average of only 1.5 lots. This demonstrates one important difference between the countryside and the towns of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century eastern Texas. Ownership of town real estate had been more highly concentrated during the early years. Over time, as commercial cotton production produced a marked increase in the concentration of real property ownership in the countryside, this became less true for the towns where real property was more widely held than ever. This illustrates an important feature of commercial cotton production. Indeed, it provided opportunity and prosperity for the growing professional middle class of merchants, newspaper publishers, physicians, attorneys, bankers, cotton buyers, and railroad managers. The greater diffusion of the ownership of real town property shows the presence (increasing over time) of those with cash incomes sufficient to purchase and hold such property.

Farms made modest gains over the forty-year period as a percentage of the county's total household wealth. In 1870 farmland had claimed 45.3 percent of the total wealth. By 1910, at the height of cotton produc-

tion, farms claimed 58.0 percent of the county's total household wealth. Town real estate's share comprised one-quarter of household wealth in 1910. Taken together, it is clear that real estate was by far the dominant component of wealth-holding in turn-of-the-century Hunt County at 83.0 percent of all household wealth.

The changing distribution and make-up of personal property is equally instructive regarding the nature of change facing rural Texans. There were four major forms of taxable personal property commonly held during the era. They consisted of the all-important conveyances (the farm wagon, but also a few buggies and carriages and, in 1910, one automobile, all referred to here as wagons for the sake of simplicity) normally used by the farmer for both farm work and family transportation; livestock (hogs, milk cows, beef cattle, horses, mules, and donkeys; only two instances of sheep ownership appeared in the entire forty-year, 1,000-case sample and thus were included in the miscellaneous category); miscellaneous property (including any farm implements, machinery, or commercial property listed as personal property by a single family), and finally the rare bit of cash (money on hand or in savings). Farmers did not render the expected value of their crops both because it was not taxable and because they were rarely the sole legal owners of such crops. How did concentration and distribution of such personal property change over time? How did each form of personal property fare as a proportion of total household wealth?

In any given decade, less than half of all families owned any means of conveyance. Data on families' ownership of wagons and other forms of transportation was not gathered for the year 1870. Thereafter, the rate of ownership of this valuable asset remained stable with just under half of all households owning at least one. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how the other half managed. Of course, some of the non-owners were no doubt town-dwellers, but in 1910 not quite a quarter of Hunt Countians lived in towns, and some town-dwellers did own buggies and carriages.¹⁰ Farmers without such means of transportation had to rely upon nearby family members, good-natured neighbors, or, more likely, their landlords. The mean value of individual vehicles rose and fell within a seven-dollar limit, going from a high of thirty dollars in 1880 to a low of twenty-three dollars in 1900. After minor fluctuations the wagon ended the period claiming 1.3 percent of family wealth. Although indispensable, it was a bit player on the economic scene.

Work animals comprised another essential element of pre-mechanized agriculture. The tax roll classified horses, mules, and don-

keys together. There were only a few donkeys compared to horses and mules, and somewhat more horses than mules. Both horses and mules were used for fieldwork and as saddle mounts while the few donkeys were kept by breeders for the purpose of producing mules. The average number of horses, mules, and donkeys owned by those households owning at least one changed dramatically over the forty years in question. The 1870 average was 8.1 animals per family with 89.0 percent of households owning at least one. By 1910 the number of horses and mules dropped to fewer than 3 per family among the 57.4 percent of Hunt County families who now owned at least one. Over the years the average valuation per animal had risen from thirty dollars in 1870 to fifty-eight dollars in 1910. Real prices paid for horses and mules varied by age and training, but farmers routinely paid more than one hundred dollars for a single animal.¹¹ Yet, horses' and mules' relative position within all household property decreased markedly over the period from a quarter of all household wealth in 1870 to 7 percent in 1910 due to their declining numbers.

The problem landlords had with a milk cow was that for every acre she grazed, that was a third of a bale of cotton he would never see. On the other hand, milk, cheese, and butter comprised dietary mainstays among the yeomanry. Families with milk cows usually kept two of them to ensure that at least one was producing.¹² As milk cows grew scarcer, families did well to own the needed two. The average number of cows among those owning at least one (it is important to note this distinction in that these are not averages for the whole population) fell from around twenty in 1870 to two in 1910. Still, two cows were sufficient to meet a family's needs; unfortunately, most families did not own even one. Over the forty-year period, owning a milk cow ceased being the overwhelmingly majority experience (77.0 percent in 1870) and, instead, became the province of a fortunate minority (46.6 percent in 1910). The share of household wealth made up of cattle fell from nearly 7 percent in 1870 to 1 percent in 1910.

Hogs also registered a decline as a share of family wealth. Hogs were not counted in the 1870 tax rolls, but over the thirty years between 1880 and 1910 they declined in importance by almost every standard of evaluation. The average number of hogs held by hog-owners went down by nearly two-thirds, the percentage of households owning at least one halved, and hogs' 1910 share of household wealth was less than one-third its 1880 level. In 1880 the average hog owner had eleven hogs. That, like the small herd of cattle, represented a self-reproducing number: a boar,

a sow or two, and a litter of pigs. Almost half of all Hunt County households in the 1880 tax roll sample possessed at least one hog. By 1910 hog owners owned only an average of four animals each, and, more significantly, just less than a quarter of households owned any hogs at all. Some of this decline no doubt resulted from the increased incidence of town living. Even so, at the 1910 rate of Hunt Countians living in towns (24.2 percent), that would still find about two-thirds of farm families without hogs, once an integral part of the self-sufficient economy. It is doubtful that Hunt Countians stopped liking pork. The differences between 1880 and 1910 would be made up, by those able, in store-bought items such as the small canned hams that even self-sufficient farmers sometimes purchased when their home-preserved pork ran out.¹³ One disadvantage in this exchange was that store-bought food, usually purchased on credit at high interest rates, took up a greater share of a farm family's resources than had the casually produced and maintained hogs.

The railroads' delivery of canned ham into formerly self-sufficient farming communities may have struck some people as ironic. In addition to canned hams, the railroads also delivered the international cotton market to Central and East Texas. Cotton, in turn, fueled the soaring price of land, which more than anything else produced high tenancy rates. Tenants, directed by their landlords, used the land to produce an inedible and mortgaged crop in order to pay for the sustenance (plus interest) their parents had once produced for themselves. Increasing numbers of Texas tenant families were unable to afford such purchases and times of hunger replaced the bounty of free-range hogs fattening in the woods. Rebecca Sharpless writes of early-twentieth-century black-land tenants that "people who bought rather than grew most of their food suffered." Because "most of the region's labor force spent its time in commercial agriculture, not subsistence farming, many families went hungry for parts of the year, a bitter irony for people living on the very rich Blacklands soil."¹⁴

From 1870 until 1910 the story of livestock in Hunt County's changing wealth-holding pattern is a story of decline. By 1880 the relative value of livestock, a once dominant sector of the economy, shrunk in relation to the county's increased land values. In 1870 the combined value of horses, mules, donkeys, milk cows, and hogs made up about a third of Hunt County's household wealth. Thereafter, the numbers steadily declined to the 1910 level of only 8.3 percent of the county's household wealth.

Money made up the most unequally distributed form of wealth in

any given decade between 1870 and 1910, appearing only among the upper tenth in any decade. In 1870 9 percent of the sample population possessed some money while by 1910 only 3.4 percent did so. In 1870 the top 1 percent of those possessing cash held 37.4 percent of all money while in 1910 the top 1 percent held 54.8 percent. This category covered every conceivable means of savings, investment, cash on hand or in a bank, or loaned out at interest. As might be expected in an economy dominated early by semi-subsistence farmers and dominated numerically later by impoverished tenants, cash did not make much of an appearance in most Hunt County homes. The average amount of cash owned by the minority of households having any money remained fairly fixed over the forty years in question, varying between four hundred dollars at the low end and just under a thousand at the high end. Of course, these were both substantial sums.

The last component of personal wealth analyzed here, miscellaneous property, demands some explanation. Such property included all personal wealth not included in the categories of conveyances, horses and mules, cows, hogs, and cash. This consisted of a wide variety of items from merchandise to sheep, steam engines to manufacturers' implements. They are listed together here as miscellaneous property because each individual item occurred at extremely low rates throughout the sample. Since the analysis excluded businesses, only when a family recorded among the personal property "merchandise" did that particular variable appear in the sample. Likewise, sheep are included here since only two out of a thousand households listed sheep among their livestock during the forty-year period. One might expect that as the availability of manufactured items of all kinds increased so too would the distribution and ranking of this category go up. Such was not the case. Even the per owner value of miscellaneous property fell between 1870 and 1910. The level of concentration of this component of personal wealth increased as well; in 1870 the vast majority (80.0 percent) of Hunt Countians owned some form of miscellaneous property averaging \$490 per owner. By 1910 the dollar amount dropped to \$343, and only about a quarter of households owned any form of miscellaneous property. This illustrates the general impoverishment of the majority of farm families. Even this innocuous category of wealth experienced a remarkable degree of concentration. In fact, the variable "miscellaneous property" showed a complete reversal of its early pattern of majority ownership. The 1870 level of 80.0 percent ownership simply indicates another fast-disappearing facet of the self-sufficient subsistence farm. A greater vari-

ety of goods and material existed on the self-sufficient subsistence farm. Cotton sharecroppers were not noted for possessing such accouterments of subsistence production as syrup mills and vats, hay cutters and binders, threshers, firewood splitters, and a variety of plows, planters, and other implements not directly needed for cotton production. In 1870 80 percent of households owned miscellaneous property but only 25 percent did so in 1910.

Indeed, changes occurring in the rank of personal property among Hunt County's families starkly indicate the impoverishment of the tenant household, the new poor majority. In 1870 the value of personal property (wagons, livestock, cash, and miscellaneous property) made up the majority of all household wealth in the county at 53.6 percent. Thereafter, by fairly regular increments, personal property's share of the total wealth fell off over the next forty years until 1910 when it claimed just 16.9 percent.

Aging tenant farmers suffered most as a result of the new economic realities. Their cultural antecedents led them to expect to earn their own farms as a commonly attained badge of competence and maturity. Their families, the new rural poor majority, were most battered by the traumatic economic transformations of the turn of the century. Likewise, small farm-owners experienced some of the same changes living in close proximity in the Hunt County countryside with the new tenant majority. From the 1870–1910 manuscript censuses for Hunt County comes an even closer portrait of the rural household in matters of race, sex, region of origin, family size, and age. The following is based on a sample of 1,097 farm families recorded in the Hunt County Manuscript Census for the years 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910.¹⁵

The rate of landlessness among Hunt County farmers steadily increased across the forty-year period.¹⁶ The vast majority of farm families listed males as head of household. But over the forty-year period, there occurred some increase in female-headed farm families. In 1870 only about one out of a hundred farm families was headed by a woman; in 1910 nearly six were headed by a woman. This trend was strongest among owners. In 1910 only 2.1 percent of tenants were women while females made up 12.5 percent of farm owners. Tenant farming by a single never-married woman would have been unusual. On the other hand, a single woman or widow who inherited ownership of a farm would have stayed on and run the operation. Further, a widowed tenant woman might continue farming, at least if she had children old enough to shoulder a good part of the field work. Each of the tenant women in this sample had at

least three children at home over the age of eighteen. Every woman heading a farm household in the 1910 sample had been widowed. Each was white with a mean age of 53, ranging from 33 to 62 years of age, having given birth to an average of eight children with six surviving.

African American farmers declined as a percentage of farm operators in Hunt County over the forty-year period. In 1870 black farmers comprised 7.4 percent of all farmers in the manuscript census sample (with no aggregate census figures to measure against). Following a steady downward trend evident in 1880 and 1900, by 1910 only a little over 3 percent of the Hunt County farmers in the sample were black (5.2 in the aggregate census).¹⁷ Since black Hunt Countians' share of the total population hovered between 10 and 9 percent for the entire period, the 1870 showing of 7.4 percent came in closest to the actual racial make-up of the county. The simplest and most believable explanation of the relative decline of black farmers is that, like women, they were squeezed off the land by a cultural marketplace that privileged white males. Black owners more or less maintained their relative position among all farm owners at about 2 percent in both 1870 and 1910. Tellingly, the percentage of all tenants who were black declined from 14.3 percent in 1870 to 4.1 percent in 1910.

Even more telling is the comparative black and white tenancy rates. As might be expected in 1870 African American farmers share rented or cropped at double the rate of white farmers. Even given the 1870 sample's suspect overall tenancy rate, the difference between the tenancy rates for black farmers compared to white farmers in 1870 Hunt County most likely was 2 to 1. According to the 1870 sample, 88.2 percent of black farmers were tenants, and the white tenancy rate was just under half that at 42.4 percent. The 1900 and 1910 sample tenancy rates were virtually identical to the published census rates for Hunt County for white farmers and still close for blacks, at least in 1910. The 1900 census tenancy rate for white farmers was three-tenths of 1 percent less than the sample and in 1910 three-tenths of 1 percent greater than the sample; the 1900 census tenancy rate for black farmers was 19.4 points less than the sample and in 1910 2.2 points less.¹⁸ The discrepancy in 1900 results from sampling error for black farmers who most likely lived in clusters and, if so, were slighted by the systematic random selection of cases from the manuscript census. At any rate, both sources agree that white tenancy rates soared in Hunt County (see chapter 2), and black tenancy rates declined somewhat. This should not be interpreted to mean that blacks as a group gained ground in farming in Hunt County during the

forty years. Instead, as shown previously, the percentage of black farmers declined considerably. Ironically, then, declining black tenancy rates indicated diminished, not expanded, economic opportunity. White supremacy and the huge increase in white migration into Texas after 1870 pushed black tenants off the land.

Almost all Hunt County farmers were southern-born. Texas was still a state of immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. In Hunt County, even in 1910, only about a third of its farmers were native Texans. The majority had been born elsewhere in the South, and, even among the scarce natives, most were first- or second-generation residents of the state. In 1870 Hunt County farmers were a highly homogeneous body with over 90 percent born in the South. The largest single contingent (well over one half) of 1870 farmers had been born in the Upper South; the Lower South contributed just over a quarter; while not quite a tenth were native-born Texans; 5 percent had been born elsewhere in the United States; and less than 1 percent were foreign-born.¹⁹ If anything, the 1910 Hunt County farm population was even more homogeneous than in 1870. With the passage of time after immigration leveled off, native Texans began to make up a larger portion of the population. By 1910 Texans comprised just over a third of Hunt County farm household heads, slightly edging the Lower South natives who, in turn, had gained very slightly over those born in the Upper South. All southern-born Hunt County farmers (including Texans) made up 98.7 percent of farm heads of household. Lower South immigrants made their gains after 1880. In fact, they lost ground between 1870 and 1880; only after the railroads brought Hunt County into the cotton market did Lower South residents grow relative to the other categories.²⁰ Furthermore, non-southerners and foreign-born farmers dramatically declined over this same period.

What relationship existed between a farmer's place of birth and his tenure status? Throughout the period native Texans consistently fared worse in the competition for ownership in Hunt County. In 1870 native Texans' tenancy rate outpaced others' by fifteen percentage points; by 1910 three-fourths of Texas-born Hunt County farmers were tenants.

Why did Texas-born farmers share rent or crop at a higher rate than their neighbors? First, the native Texan tenancy rate reflected both the higher tenancy rates and the lower geographical mobility rates for the recently emancipated African American farmer. While only 8.5 percent of 1870 white Hunt County farmers were born in Texas, 17.6 percent of the black farmers were native Texans. By 1910 just under a third of white

Hunt County farmers were natives compared to nine-tenths of black farmers. Since blacks made up only a fraction of all farmers, even the higher tenancy rates they normally experienced could not explain all of the phenomenon of Texans' higher tenancy rates. The simplest explanation is that due to the resources it took to move great distances, in the aggregate immigrants tended to have more money than natives.

These differences between owners and tenants and Texans and non-Texans are significant, but keep in mind that for the most part these farmers, owners, and renters were members of the same culture. Whether native Texan or native of some other southern state—and even across the color line—these people had many cultural similarities. Among whites the cultural distinctions were minimal. Between blacks and whites, the chief cultural distinction relevant here concerned the experience of tenancy. While thirds and fourths tenancy would most likely represent real practical achievement and transgenerational upward mobility for a mature black farming family in 1910, it most likely represented economic slippage (at least across one generation) for a white farm family of similar age. Even this distinction may be easily over-emphasized; many black farmers (22.2 percent in Hunt County in 1910) owned their own land, and landownership certainly represented the focal point of hope of both black and white rural families. While tenancy rates for native Texans were highest, over time farmers in all of the place-of-birth categories suffered increased tenancy rates. While three-fourths of Texas-born Hunt County farmers were tenants in 1910, so too were nearly two-thirds of both Upper and Lower South immigrants. Certainly there existed some differences in rates of landlessness between different demographic categories, but, in fact, no great cultural distinctions existed between rural-dwelling farmer-owners and their tenant neighbors except that white share renters and croppers were the disappointed legatees of a landowning culture. The cultural similarity of these Hunt County farmers can be demonstrated by considering another small window on culture: family size.

The most remarkable feature of the size of Hunt County farm families is the degree to which they did not change over the forty-year period. The average-sized farm family consisted of about five members both in 1870 and 1910. This figure represents only a snapshot of a family likely to continue to grow after the census-taker had come and gone, of course. The mean number for 1910, for example, of 5.1 persons represented a family where the head of household was forty years of age and still likely to reproduce again. The widows encountered earlier

in this study had an average of eight children over the course of their child-bearing years. (In the next chapter the children of turn-of-the-century farm couples will report an average of eight children.) To be sure, there existed a four-tenths of a person decline between 1870 and 1910, and perhaps that indicates a gradual falling off in the number of children per couple but certainly at no precipitous rate. But were there significant differences between the number of children produced by tenants and owners? The contemporary charge that tenants—especially sharecroppers—had “too many” children formed a new conventional wisdom in the South. It helped to justify, in some people’s minds, the obvious inequalities of the agricultural economy. People were poor because they had too many children. One Kaufman County landlord explained tenant poverty by observing complacently that the “nomadic” Texas tenant had “more children than anybody.”²¹ In fact, such pronouncements were simply false.

The only significant difference in the average size of families by ownership status occurred in the earliest decade of the study. And, contrary to stereotype, in 1870 owners were likely to have more children than tenants. While keeping in mind that family size is also a statistical proxy for the age of the farm couple, it is still informative to examine in more detail the rates of landlessness for various-sized families. In 1870 Hunt County farmers most likely to be tenants had only one or two family members, an indication of a young farmer indeed. In fact, those families least likely to be landless were those with nine or ten members. By 1910 conditions had worsened for families of all sizes, but the steepest rise in landlessness occurred for those nine- to ten-member families that had boasted a 90 percent ownership rate in 1870; forty years later only 31.6 percent owned land. Still, no apparent drawback existed to large families in 1910. The families with the best chance of owning land were those that had between seven and eight members. Nevertheless, there was an optimum size beyond which families procreated to disadvantage. Those with eleven or more members were considerably more likely to be tenants than those with seven to nine members. With that exception, family size generally had little relationship with the incidence of landlessness in the later era.

From 1870 to 1910 a farmer’s chances of remaining a tenant farmer into the mature years increased significantly. Overall, farmers’ age profile did not change much over time with the average farmer’s age around forty from 1870 through 1910. There were few extreme cases. Teenagers never headed up more than 2 percent of farm households, and farmers

over sixty rarely accounted for over 10 percent. The overwhelming majority of farmers—between 68.3 percent and 79.1 percent in any given decade—were between twenty and forty-nine years of age. In 1870 the “agricultural ladder” relationship between age and ownership still existed (at least for whites). In this earlier period, young people normally began their careers share renting or cropping. As a result, the yeomanry considered tenancy a condition of the young, and this remained true in the 1870s when most young men could expect to begin their adult careers as renters as was the case in most agricultural societies. Historian James A. Henretta found that for the “preindustrial” eastern farmer, “to be ‘young’ in this agricultural society (as in most) was either to be landless or without sufficient land to support a family.”²² But the common experience in the American past bred an expectation that most tenants would eventually own land of their own. The critical difference in Texas by 1910 lay in the low probability of that outcome. In 1870 three out of five (60 percent) Hunt County farmers in their thirties owned their own farms while by 1910 only one in four (25 percent) Hunt County farmers in this age category owned their own farms. Even farmers in their forties had a landless rate of two-thirds in 1910. Hunt County farmers in their thirties and forties in the 1910s had been raised by parents reaching maturity during the 1870s when ownership of land was a given among the small farmer class. These children of the nineteenth century readily internalized the expectations of their parents and grandparents. But these children of independent yeomen came of age in an economy marked by concentration of landholding and dominated by landlord, credit merchant, enforced cotton production, the crop lien, and, increasingly, slip-page to permanent half-cropper status.

Herein, however, lies one of the greatest ironies and contradictions of this story. Tenancy represented cultural slippage only for the white majority. In fact, for black farmers in 1910, share renting or cropping resulted from a triumphant individual struggle over the racial barriers that kept most potential black farmers off the land in Hunt County. So, while the tenancy rate for black farmers in the sample actually declined slightly between 1870 and 1910, so too did the percentage of Hunt County farmers who were black.²³ During that period the position of blacks in Hunt County’s population had not dropped proportionately: in 1870 10.5 percent of Hunt Countians were black while in 1910 their share stood at 9.5 percent. What became, then, of Hunt County’s black residents no longer on the land? Except for the small number of professionals, the rest worked as farm laborers (in most cases an economic

position worse off even than half-cropping) or took jobs in towns such as Greenville at the cotton compresses and warehouses, as seasonal cotton pickers, railroad workers, or the variety of low-wage service work available from white-owned businesses and households. The answer to whether or not these town jobs represented an improvement over share-cropping awaits further research. Suffice it to say that the white majority certainly did not think so since they reserved opportunities which they most valued for themselves. The same may be said of tenant farming. As farming opportunities of any nature narrowed for the white sons of landowners, they would become less and less tolerant of the African American minority in their midst. Further, the impoverished white majority's own racism hamstrung any potentially effective class analysis of their own predicament.²⁴

Cotton's triumph built growing towns with a prosperous middle class enjoying the turn-of-the-century's rising standard of living. Some in the countryside prospered, too. But, the economic picture for most Hunt County farm families between 1870 and 1910 grew more bleak. Ownership of real estate concentrated in the upper third of the population, as did personal property and wealth. As tenancy grew, so too did the scarcity of subsistence features of the old self-sufficient economy. While the upper tenth lost a little ground in shares of wealth, the immediate two tenths below them completely absorbed the difference. At the bottom of the scale the incidence of complete propertylessness leaped upward dramatically. The poor became both more numerous and more dependent upon others to supply the means of earning a living. And, most telling of all, the portion of middle-aged farmers still working somebody else's land had multiplied.²⁵

» CHAPTER 4 «

“A LEGITIMATE AND USEFUL LIFE”

Family, Work, and Community

Early in the spring of 1915 the U.S. Senate's Industrial Relations Commission held hearings in Dallas on the increasingly heated “land question in the Southwest.” This progressive body, known as the Walsh Commission for its chairman, Frank P. Walsh, sought solutions to labor unrest throughout the country. In Dallas the commission took the testimony of a representative small farmer named William Travis Davis. A few years earlier, this former tenant had made initial payment on a farm and struggled each year to maintain his mortgage, knowing firsthand the hardships of a tenant's life. When questioned about his hopes for his children's future, Davis replied that he wished for them all to “stay on the farm,” not as tenants, he specified, but as farm owners. A panelist asked if Davis did not think it prudent for his children to prepare for town occupations. He demurred. “I would rather they become tillers of the soil.” Pressed further by his questioners, Davis summarized the stubbornly and widely held agrarian ideal by declaring that he wanted for each of his offspring “a legitimate life, a happy life, [and] a useful life” as a landowning farmer.¹

Even as the national economy eroded the basis of the rural majority's community, the people themselves tried to maintain their way of life. When possible, they continued to view each other as neighbors with expectations and obligations. Even in the midst of economic change, people had to make it from planting to picking. So they did as members

of more or less tightly knit communities governed by tradition, old and new economic strictures, and the cycles of nature. The everyday family lives of these “common ordinary people” deserve to be understood on their own terms.²

Oral interviews and other sources supply concrete details of a people and their time revealed in such things as work, family economics, food, gender roles, pastimes, and celebrations. In many ways the more than three dozen oral interviewees typified their place and time with the one exception of longevity. The interviewees’ average birth year was 1898. About a third was born before 1896, another third was born between 1896 and 1899, and the youngest third was born between 1900 and 1913. In every case the subjects were able to recall at least the second decade of the twentieth century. Most answers to the interview questions come from their experiences as older children and adolescents. Also critical to an understanding of the narrative is the assumption of Hunt County and the surrounding area’s typicality. Its location at the juncture of East and Central Texas is especially important here, if the experiences of the interviewees are to be taken as indicative of a larger experience. All of the subjects answered questions about their families’ experiences living in Hunt or nearby counties.³

These interview subjects’ memories offer a rare window on the past. As witnesses to and products of their parents’ culture, their stories allow an even longer avenue of access to a past world.⁴

According to the census, the average household in turn-of-the-century East and Central Texas totaled five people. Unlike the snapshot nature of census reports, however, interviews with survivors reveal final family size. The interviewees represented families with an average of nine members. The only variation occurred between rural- and town-dwellers. The farm family (both owners and tenants) averaged ten persons while town-dwellers’ families averaged five. White and black families among the interviewees averaged almost exactly the same number.

Thirty-two of the interviewees grew up on farms, and the majority of the questions considered here concern farming and rural community life. The testimony of the seven nonfarm subjects, then, appears only in specific instances for comparative purposes. Among the farm subjects, children of owners outnumbered children of tenants nineteen to thirteen, although not by design. Among tenants there were no cash renters; all were the children of share renters or croppers, which reflected the reality of tenancy. Among the children of tenants interviewed nine were “thirds and fourths” renters, only two subjects came from families

working “on the halves,” and two more had experienced both types of tenancy.

All of the subjects’ mothers were homemakers, an easily misunderstood word when applied to farm women. Labeling farm women as homemakers may obscure the significance of their full economic partnership in making the farm a success, as shall be seen later. Other than farmers, nonfarm fathers ran the gamut of small-town occupations: railroad company employee, stock dealer, banker, constable, merchant, carpenter, and barber.

Little social mobility existed for the interviewees’ farm families. Only two of the tenant families eventually came to own their own farms, and only two reported parents who had “worked on the halves” and later achieved “thirds and fourths” status.

Among the twenty-six subjects able to give specific acreage amounts, the interviewees lived on farms averaging 93 acres, slightly less than the East and Central Texas average but slightly more than the Hunt County average. Most Hunt County farmers—owners and tenants—worked relatively small operations: 31 percent lived and worked on 49 acres or less and 76 percent worked farms of less than 100 acres.⁵

At an average 122 acres, owners’ farms were twice as big as tenant farms (66 acres) among the interviewees. The experience of the five African American interviewees reporting specific acreage was also typical of the time and place. Black owners farmed substantially smaller acreages than did white owners (closer in size to the average tenant farm) while black tenants were worse off than the rest at an average 45 acres.

Far from being only a matter of status, more than any other single factor, farm size determined how well or how poorly a family lived. Especially after the end of free range and the coming of fence laws, small farms reduced farm families’ realistic choices. As Gavin Wright has shown, the smaller the farm, the less chance even owners had of practicing “safety-first” self-sufficient agriculture.⁶

Soil type also went a long way toward determining a farm family’s standard of living. The rich blackland of Central Texas provided cotton producers some of the most fertile soil in North America. In Hunt County and farther south and east where the edge of the blackland met East Texas proper there occurred large areas of “mixed” soil, a combination of the rich black clay and the sandyland of East Texas’ post-oak strip. This soil was capable of producing cotton as well, if not in the same abundance, as the blackland. None of the interviewees grew up

in the Piney Woods of “deep” East Texas, the least hospitable region for cotton. The loose sandy soil of the post-oak strip was agreeable to a variety of crops but did not produce the cash staple in abundance. Blackland farmers had little respect for the sandy land. One adage had it that “you could make a better living by accident on the blackland than you can by trying on sandyland.” A variant of that theme promoted by blackland landlords had it that a tenant on the blackland was better off than landowners on the sandyland. The truth of this observation depended, of course, on culturally based perceptions and goals. One disgusted cotton renter swore “she had left the blackland . . . and would not go back. Better to own a little piece of sandyland than rent a hundred acres of blackland.”⁷

Ironically, the less commercially appealing sandy soil proved to be a bulwark of protection for the continued widespread ownership of the land by small farmers. Poor people could afford to own sandyland long after that had ceased being the case in cotton-rich Central Texas. This general trend manifested itself among the interview subjects as well. Only a fifth of the interviewees grew up on exclusively blackland farms with the rest on mixed soil and sandyland. As might be expected, most of the subjects’ parents from the blackland farms were tenants while most of those from mixed and sandy farms were owners. Owners grew a greater variety of foodstuffs than tenants. Almost all of the tenant children reported only cotton and corn or other feed crops as their families’ main products. The majority of owners’ children reported that their families also concentrated on cotton and corn but reported greater subsistence land use including wheat, pasture and cattle, peanuts, peas, and Irish and sweet potatoes. Not one tenant family engaged in diversified, self-sufficient production.

Only one farm family grew no cotton, but their exceptional case serves to illuminate the common experience. In 1905 Margaret Bragg moved her family from Dallas to a farm in north Hunt County near the village of Kingston. There she began farming nearly 57 acres with hired labor and the help of her two sons and three daughters, including twelve-year-old Beulah Bell Bragg. She grew no cotton. Instead, she raised corn and sorghum cane, had a corn mill open to the public, slaughtered two or three hogs a year, cultivated a large garden, and supplemented the family’s diet with fish and game. Her three-to-four milk cows produced enough surplus for Bragg to sell butter to local grocers. On rare occasions the Braggs slaughtered a calf, and the surplus beef was likewise sold to

nearby stores. Beulah Bragg Nicholson (b. 1893) remembered that the family did not buy anything from the store except flour and sugar. This they accomplished on less than fifty acres.

At first glance it might appear that the Bragg farm should have served as a model for an apparently spendthrift generation of small farmers intent upon throwing away their independence in an irrational pursuit of cotton profits. But the reason behind how the Braggs were able to operate a self-sufficient farm free of cotton explains why other farmers did not. Beulah's father worked in Dallas during the week as a carpenter, commuting the sixty-odd miles on the weekends via the interurban railroad. That access to a cash income, no matter how modest, allowed the Braggs to purchase land for the purpose of subsistence farming free of the tyranny of cotton. The more encumbered with debt, the more exclusively farmers cultivated cotton.⁸

Tenants planted over twice as much of their acreage in cotton as did owners. Among the interviewees, owners planted just under 30 percent of their farms in cotton while on tenant farms nearly 75 percent of the landlords' acres were in the cash crop.

The unequal place of cotton on tenant farms resulted from the tenants' lack of power over production choices. Increasingly, landlords viewed the tenant simply as an employee hired to produce cotton. One absentee-landlord reported that on the dozens of 50-acre farms he rented to sharecroppers he expected 40 acres—80 percent of the farm—to be planted in cotton. Among East Texas farmers surveyed in 1914, tenants averaged 64 percent of the farm in cotton, while owners devoted only an average of 39 percent of their acres to the cash crop. The rank of tenancy mattered. Those working on the halves devoted over 40 percent more of their acres to cotton than did those working on the thirds and fourths.⁹ Texas farmers—when free to choose—chose safety-first self-sufficient production. In so doing they chose to protect their continued ownership of the land, the foundation of their liberty and status.

Most rural families lived spartan lives. Material goods, especially manufactured items, were scarce. Homes usually contained limited reading material, typically a Bible and, increasingly, one or another of the national mail-order merchants' catalogs. In addition to a local newspaper, denominational, agricultural, or political periodicals sometimes provided diversion.¹⁰ Everyday life revolved around work, food, church, music, and the recreation provided by relations with family and other members of the community.

Farm families sought to produce most of the basic necessities of life

and referred to that practice approvingly as “living at home.” Clifton Peoples (b. 1912), son of a black tenant farmer in sandyland Hopkins County, summed it up: “We raised our hogs, chickens, in other words, living at home. All that was just home. You lived at home in those days. We didn’t live in a paper sack or at the store.”¹¹ Most of the farm interview subjects shared certain basic practices in this regard, although there occurred some variation between tenants and owners.

Tenant children grew up having less meat to eat than their owner neighbors. All farm interviewees reported that their families kept some hogs and chickens. Contrary to Texas stereotypes, beef was scarce with only eight of thirty-nine households keeping cattle for slaughter, and when a calf was slaughtered, the hard-to-preserve meat was immediately consumed, sold, shared, or traded among neighbors.¹² The average nine-member owner family consumed four hogs per year while the same-sized tenant family got by on three. Yet some tenants had no hogs at all. In Hunt County, ownership of hogs had fallen from almost half of all families in 1880 to just less than a quarter in 1910. In 1915 the sharecroppers on Judge M. M. Brooks’s Kaufman County farms were among those with no access to this homegrown staple. Brooks, a former Hunt County lawyer and gubernatorial candidate, had, along with his two brothers, amassed over 5,000 acres of “high grade” blackland. Brooks admitted that none of his tenants had hogs but blamed that condition on their own improvidence and stupidity. He claimed that he encouraged his tenants to raise their own pork, although he would have required any such hogs to have been penned with his work stock and to subsist on “waste.” Brooks further asserted that he had offered to make loans to his tenants to purchase such hogs but that not a single tenant family of the fifty-odd families on his place had taken him up on his generosity.¹³ Brooks’s sharecroppers’ side of the story is unavailable, but one Lamar County sharecropper recalled that on more than one occasion landlords had prohibited his raising hogs. One such landlord simply informed his tenant that he “did not want any hogs about.” Another ordered him to plant so many acres in cotton that keeping and feeding a hog was out of the question.¹⁴

For those with access to hogs, however, pork proved the main source of the family’s meat, rivaling even the ubiquitous chicken. During the winter, after it could be safely cured, salted, or smoked, the rural majority ate pork almost every day. Chickens were kept for their eggs, barter value, and meat only for occasions such as holidays and Sunday dinner. Unlike freshly killed chicken, however, pork had to be preserved

through smoke and later sugar curing for the family's use through much of the year. Rural people attached great importance to this operation, which commenced after "the first good freeze" sometime in November or December. After slaughtering the hog, farmers scalded it to remove the hair and hung the carcass outside to be dressed. Then the various cuts were placed in a meat box with each layer of hams, shoulders, middlings, or jowls separated with a thick layer of salt, where it stayed from six to eight weeks. Afterward it was removed and smoked in the smokehouse. Families had different preferences here. Floyd Loftin (1865–1921), a white tenant in Rains and Hopkins Counties, washed off the salt and rubbed the pork with salt, pepper, and borax before hanging it in his smokehouse to be smoked from a small pan of smoldering hickory. Bill W. Williams (1860–1927), a black Wood County owner, rubbed his pork with black and red pepper. He then hung the pork from the top of his smokehouse with bear grass. Even after sugar curing replaced smoking, the family smokehouse remained the repository for pork.¹⁵

Sausage was the other main product derived from hogs. Farm women stuffed hog intestines with ground and spiced pork for this most common feature of the farm breakfast.¹⁶ Cut crossways and fried, these "patties" were used most commonly as breakfast meat but also appeared as a sandwich for other meals eaten away from home by men going into town or children carrying their lunches to school. Blanche Amanda Gray (b. 1899), daughter of white Hopkins County owners, remembered her mother preserving pre-fried sausage patties in crock jars by sealing each patty between layers of hardened lard.¹⁷

Subsidiary pork products included such delicacies as headcheese and chitterlings. Head cheese was made by boiling the hog's head until the skull could easily be removed and the cooled liquid residue congealed into something that could be sliced into thin layers; chitterlings (pronounced chitlins) were simply hog intestines, fried or boiled. This was the food of the rural poor majority both by necessity and by taste. Cured or smoked pork seldom lasted from one hog-killing to the next. Families who failed to consume all of their pork by the end of the summer had to discard it anyway since "the meat'd get so strong you couldn't eat it." Blanche Gray remembered that her family usually consumed the last of their home-cured pork sometime in June. Until the first hard freeze brought hog-killing weather, they bought bacon and canned hams from a rural store.¹⁸

Most of the farm families supplemented their diets with game and fish. Children of tenants reported this in their diets at a greater rate than

did children of owners, but a majority of both groups ate some game and fish. The most frequent game meat came from the small common animals of forest and field—squirrels and rabbits. But farm families also occasionally ate opossum, raccoon, deer, and wild fowl such as quail, duck, and wild chicken. In the variety of game eaten no division appeared between owners and tenants; each group indicated use of about the same species. Interestingly, game meat was loved by some and avoided at all costs by others. This was especially the case with opossum and raccoon.¹⁹ The families regularly ate catfish and sometimes perch caught in streams and ponds.

All of the farm interviewees' families kept at least one milk cow. While ownership of milk cows dropped between 1870 and 1910, it declined less sharply than for hogs. Among the twenty-two interviewees who recalled the number of cows their family kept, farm owners had more cows than did tenants: 60 percent of owners, but only 25 percent of tenants, had three or more milk cows. This simply translated into greater availability of dairy products for the family. Blanche Gray opined that a family of five could be "furnished" by one milk cow if they did not "drink too much milk." But her family of five, who were not fond of milk, kept two or three milk cows every year. Farm families obtained milk, buttermilk, cream, butter, and cheese from their milk cows. Those able to do so kept several milk cows, according to Lula Bird Branom (b. 1891), because "we didn't milk them as close as they do now. Always left some for the calf." Here, tenants were at a disadvantage because landlords wanted their land in cotton, not as pasture for a small herd of milk cows. Clifton Peoples remembered the issue clearly. "Well, at that time you know you wasn't allowed to keep too many cattle. We usually had two milk cows. The landlord . . . see you couldn't take up too much of his farm, you know how it is. Didn't have no place for them. You couldn't keep much on a farm like that." By 1920 nearly 40 percent of Texas farmers owned no milk cow at all; a rise in the incidence of childhood malnutrition accompanied that statistic.²⁰

A large vegetable garden constituted an absolute necessity for the farm family attempting to "live at home." All of the interviewees queried on this point reported that their families maintained a garden. Among interviewees able to supply specific size, the farm family garden averaged one-half acre, accompanied sometimes by separate potato "patches" for Irish and sweet potatoes.²¹

Most farm families grew the same produce in their gardens. The most common items were beans, onions, potatoes, peas, cabbage, greens, and

tomatoes. Other produce usually reported included sweet corn, okra, and beets while others recalled lettuce, watermelons, radishes, peppers, cucumbers, carrots, squash, cantaloupes, and even tobacco. These commodities were used fresh in season and canned or dried for the winter and spring.²²

Perhaps the single most important staple produced by farm gardens was the potato, especially the sweet potato. Taking up only a minuscule amount of acreage, the sweet potato, if available, could provide almost year-round nutrition for the poorest farm family. In 1910, however, sweet potato production per farm in East and Central Texas was less than one-third its 1870 level. More telling is the story of sweet potatoes on the blackland. In 1870, Hunt County farms had produced an average of twenty-one bushels of sweet potatoes each; by 1910, however, Hunt County farms produced an average of one bushel of sweet potatoes per farm.²³ In reality the majority of sharecroppers grew no sweet potatoes at all. Missing out on sweet potatoes probably never haunted the culinary fantasies of tenant families; it did, however, add to their dependence on credit and reduced access to a cheap, healthful food.

Tenants had smaller gardens than farm owners. Some landlords required payment in shares from tenant garden plots. In other cases landlords refused to allow a garden at all, pressuring tenants to put every available fraction of the farm into the money crop. This situation tightened over time; a 1920 survey found 32 percent of Texas farmers had no garden and among a sample of five thousand Texas children, 40 percent were undernourished.²⁴

Some farm families had access to orchards. The most common fruit trees were peach, but pears, apples, and plums also grew in the region. Among the thirty-nine interviewees, seven had orchards. Women preserved peaches and pears by drying, canning, or making jams or jellies. Blanche Gray remembered that peaches and pears would be seeded and halved and placed on the roof of the barn to dry in the sun. Gwendolyn Cox King (b. 1901), daughter of white owners, remembered that her family had a "huge orchard" of mostly peaches but also apples, berries, and plums. Julia Horn McWhirter (b. 1898), daughter of white owners, fondly recalled her family's big orchard from which her mother "put up" fruit preserves, canned peaches, peach pickles, and dried fruit. Having no orchard did not necessarily rule out a family's access to fresh fruit. In stable communities with long-term relationships, custom encouraged that neighbors and kin share surplus produce from garden and orchard. Of course, this was not always the case; practices varied with the level

of community stability and the individual proclivities of people. Mary Ola Chambliss, daughter of white tenants, was sent on an errand to the landlady's "big house" along a path through the orchard. The young girl picked up a peach from the ground and began eating it before being spotted by the landlady, who reprimanded her for "stealing." Even without an orchard or a generous neighbor, wild vines and native fruit trees supplied some families with dewberries, blackberries, plums, persimmons, and red and black "haws." Nora Thrasher (b. 1899), daughter of white tenants, remembered that "on weekends we kids would go black haw and red haw hunting along the creek bottoms. The red ones tasted like mellow apples."²⁵ Well into the twentieth century unfenced creek bottoms, as the woods had once been, remained available as a commons even to people who owned no land.

Women usually preserved, prepared, and served food. Customarily men only indirectly involved themselves in the process. Men fed and slaughtered hogs and carried out the dressing and preserving of the large cuts of pork for the meat box and smokehouse. Men also plowed the garden for spring planting. Clearly, however, women dominated in most areas of food preparation. As historian Rebecca Sharpless has shown, how much effort and time a farm woman could spend on food production and preservation made the difference for her family between independence and dependence, plenty and want. Such women "actively labored to subvert the crop-lien system."²⁶

This gender division of food-related work began with the garden that women tended. In some families, mothers might be assisted by the children, and a few interviewees reported that their fathers "helped" their mothers in the garden. Two-thirds of the farm interviewees reported that their mother alone, or assisted by the children, took care of the garden. No variation existed between tenants and owners on this point. After an initial spring plowing by men, women planted, cultivated, weeded, harvested, cooked, and served or canned the produce of the garden. In a sense, the garden served as a living pantry, an extension of the woman's domain, the kitchen.²⁷

Because women usually were solely responsible for cooking and serving meals, children tended to associate food with their mothers. This was especially so for the most important meal of the week, Sunday dinner. It is easy to see from Robert L. Rice's recollection of his mother's usual Sunday fare why some farm women found it difficult to attend Sunday morning church meetings: "Most Sundays Mama cooked a big dinner for our family and company, sometimes as many as thirty people.

But Mama never did complain. A tipicle [*sic*] Sunday lunch (we called it dinner) consisted of a six layer cake, maybe two, a chocolate cake and a coconut cake[,] a peach cobbler or berry cobbler, a green grape pie, a big fat baked hen and a large pan of dressing, or four fryer chickens, a pot of stewed Irish potatoes, half gallon canned green beans, a dozen large baked sweet potatoes, a big pan of cornbread, a pan of biscuits, a pound of butter and a quart of wild plum jelly." Cooking and serving meals made up a large portion of the daily work performed by farm women in a setting in which everyone had to work hard to survive.²⁸

Farm children lived in a work-filled environment. Their parents' occupation was no mystery to young people who observed firsthand their parents and older siblings going about the all-too-apparent business of survival. By the time a farm child was seven or eight years old, chances were good that he or she had begun to contribute meaningfully to the family's needs, although this varied a little by parents' ownership status. Tenant children began working at about seven years old, while farm owners' children were usually closer to nine. The age of first working varied almost none whether black or white, boy or girl. A few of the children were much older, however, before they were expected to contribute, and children of prosperous parents might hardly have to work at all. A 1914 survey of East Texas farmers found that on the average tenant children were more apt to work in the fields than children of owners. While only about half of the family members in owners' households worked in the fields, two-thirds of the members of tenant families did so. Part of the tenant-owner difference was due to gender-role differentiation. Farm owner women, especially on self-sufficient farms, still fulfilled the role of homemaker after tenant women had been forced to divide their time between home and cotton field.²⁹

The more prosperous the farm family, the less likely parents put young children to work. Lula Bird Branom's family owned 150 acres near the Hunt County line in western Hopkins County. They were well-off enough for Lula to be exempt from heavy farm work. She did not have many chores and "didn't pick much cotton" either. Gwendolyn Cox King's father owned over 400 acres in north Hunt County farms. She likewise reported that as a child her work responsibilities were few. At about age twelve or thirteen she had "little chores around the house; worked in the fields some. [But] I was no good at that." Of course, where parents had a choice, personal attitudes varied somewhat; some children of landowning farmers worked as early and as intensively as any.³⁰

On the other hand, children of the poor majority grew up working

with little or no variation. Very young children carried in wood for the fireplace or cook stove and completed other light tasks. Ocie Miller Moxley (b. 1899), daughter of a white Hunt County owner, remembered that as soon as she and her siblings arrived home from school, they changed clothes and began their chores. Among these were bringing in firewood and retrieving corn cobs from the horses' feed trough. The cobs were then soaked in coal oil and used as starters for the cook stove fire. These young workers were often accompanied by even younger siblings who watched these "grown-up" pursuits with envy. "You wanted to help before you were able to," observed Julia Horn McWhirter. Dorothy Howard, daughter of a white Hunt County owner, writes, "Everybody in Sabine Bottom worked—except babies, who soon grew old enough to demand jobs to prove they were no longer babies." As the young accompanied their only slightly older siblings about their chores, a seamless transition occurred in the child's experiences as their playful activities became more and more effective.³¹

Custom compelled some separation between boys' and girls' chores. Eventually their tasks would groom them for the roles their parents assumed they would play as adults. Boys tended to take care of outside chores while girls were expected to assist their mothers in the home. Dorothy Howard writes: "A boy's first initiation into manhood was being allowed to go with his father to slop pigs, milk cows, or open and shut gates. . . . There were no initiation rites for girls, who were born girls and stayed girls." Boys milked, penned calves so the calves' mothers could be milked, churned butter, fed livestock, thinned corn, shelled corn for chickens, chopped cotton, and picked cotton. Girls milked, washed laundry, cooked, cleaned, churned butter, washed dishes, gardened, fed chickens, gathered eggs, chopped cotton, and picked cotton. By the age of seven or eight most farm boys and girls regularly assisted in chopping and picking cotton. Tom Washington (b. 1905), son of a black Hopkins County owner, recalled that "no sooner than I got big enough to pull a hoe, I went to the field." Robert L. Rice remembered at age seven "hitting the cotton field before daylight" on his family's Hunt County tenant farm. Another child of a Hunt County tenant, Mattie Self George (b. 1892), recalled, "I started picking cotton when I was four years old. I worked out in the field every day." Willie Clowp Jeter (b. 1898), daughter of a white Kaufman County tenant, went into the fields at age ten and promptly cut her bare foot with the heavy sharp hoe; she soon mastered that dangerous implement, however, and became a valuable field hand. "I done everything my brother did."³²

Families adjusted their adherence to gender roles as needed. Julie Horn McWhirter's brother "wasn't too well," so he helped their mother with the laundry. Another circumstance affecting gender-role assignments was a family of same-sex children. "When the children in a family were all girls and a father despaired of ever having a son, he sometimes encouraged the youngest daughter to be a tomboy, taught her to do the jobs usually assigned to a boy, and boasted of her boylike accomplishments to neighbor men (who had sons)." ³³

Far from believing that they harmed their children by such an early exposure to physical labor, rural people viewed work as necessary and beneficial for both child and family. Only by experiencing work could children be conditioned to shoulder the heavy burdens awaiting them. When Charles A. McCasland (b. 1895), son of a Hunt County owner, was seventeen years old his father fell ill, and young McCasland "ran the farm" for a year. Such eventualities had to be met by preparing farm children from the beginning. Of course, this worked against the children's schooling in anything other than the small farmer's arts.

Early-twentieth-century Texas farm children's education competed with the demands of farm work and suffered from an inadequate school system. This latter was not, however, a major concern for many rural parents. Children attended school at convenient times and at other times stayed away to perform what their parents considered to be the more crucial tasks of survival. Vague and indirect answers often indicated embarrassment at the question of schooling among some of the interviewees. Nevertheless, the interviewees responding to a question about their education (just over half) appear atypical in that most had attended high school and half had graduated.

It took determination and patience for farm children to acquire the rudiments of an education. William Owens, writing of his experience as a Lamar County farm child during this era, related that it sometimes took years for a rural child to complete one grade in the elementary curriculum. Even for someone as hungry for knowledge as young Owens, brief periods in school always ended in even longer periods of work. "Cotton renter's son" G. L. Vaughan manifested both deprivation and dogged determination when he enrolled himself in the eighth grade in Greenville "a few days before my 29th birthday." Carl E. Starrett (b. 1899), son of white Hopkins County owners, finished his education at Bugscuffle School in the seventh grade at age seventeen; it had taken him roughly two years per grade. Merl Bledsoe Ward (b. 1897), daughter of white Hunt County tenants, finished the eleventh grade at Klondike

School in north Hunt County. Even under the best conditions, schooling for the early-twentieth-century rural poor majority was a precarious affair. For young Merl Bledsoe “school didn’t start ‘til you got the crop.”³⁴

Other experiences were not as positive. William Travis Davis reported that all of his children had received some education, especially his daughters. “Well, they got a right smart schooling. They got to read and write. Some of them went to school as much as two years.” Likewise, Levi and Beulah Steward’s oldest son quit school in the second grade. Steward recalled that the boy stopped attending because the family moved to “a rented place far from the school and by the time we got to where we could send him to school he was so old he was ashamed to go. He was fourteen years old.”³⁵

Parent’s nonchalance about schoolhouse education was not negligence. From their perspective, as long as their children learned to read and write and master enough arithmetic to protect them from fraud, then that was really all the learning that they needed, or could get, from school. Schooling was not seen as training for an occupation. Parents assumed children would also be farmers and knew that they could teach their children more about how to survive on a small farm than they could have learned in school. The field needed hands. Parents believed survival depended on hard work and knew of no reasons why children should not begin as early as possible in training for it.

Dorothy Mills Howard’s memoir of childhood on an early-twentieth-century East Texas farm illustrates the cycles of women’s and men’s farm work. There was pre-dawn work, daytime work, and sundown work. Only darkness and mealtimes brought respite. For men there was spring, summer, fall, and winter work; women, in addition to seasonal work, also worked in cycles measured by the days of the week.³⁶

By the turn of the twentieth century most of men’s work was aimed at the external economy of production of cotton for money. There were exceptions, certainly. Some farm owners avoided subservience to cash crop production by diversifying their operation. Even in such cases, however, the net goal was much the same as the commercial cotton farmer. Of course, some of men’s work consisted of tending subsistence production of hogs, sweet potatoes, and milk cows. On the other hand, farm women’s work focused almost entirely on the family’s internal subsistence economy. Usually women’s attention to external economic production was secondary, but in many cases, the women’s external economy made the difference between success and failure of the entire operation.

Men and boys began working before dawn, feeding and milking,

Some began preparations for the pre-dawn feedings on the evening before by shucking corn so that the grain would be ready in the early morning hours for the hungry livestock. Returning from the barn with buckets of milk, the working-age males joined the rest of the family for breakfast. Thereafter, they went to the fields to clear, build fences, plow, plant, cultivate, weed and thin, or harvest depending upon the season of the year.

Winter was the slackest season. Men slaughtered and preserved hogs and cleared new land beginning as early as November. In late winter and early spring plowing began for both new land and old. Teams broke the ground with a turning plow, and men and boys then began planting cotton and corn, each in its own time. During the summer men plowed the weeds from between the rows with a cultivator. The corn had to be thinned, and the cotton had to be chopped (thinned and weeded) with a hoe by hand. Depending on the size of the crop and the relative resources of the family, this hot and tedious labor was often performed by all family members except among the most well-off farmers who sometimes hired young neighbors at this time of year. Then, as the heat of the Texas summer began to break and the cotton began to unfold from its boll, harvest time came in September and lasted, perhaps, through November.³⁷

In addition to cotton and corn, many farmers grew sorghum cane both as livestock feed and the source of syrup. Sorghum was the most common of the Texas syrup canes although its syrup had a bitter aftertaste that led many to prefer "ribbon cane" syrup produced on the sandyland of East Texas. In late summer farmers cut and threshed the cane. The seedless tops dried as fodder while the cane itself could then be milled for syrup. Further, wheat threshers made their rounds from community to community producing a week of frenetic activity readying the bundles of grain for the maw of the giant steam-powered behemoth.³⁸

In most families among the poor-to-middling majority, everyone worked in the fields at cotton-picking time. When an individual's cotton-picking responsibilities had been satisfied at home, young and old alike often hired themselves out within the community to pick cotton for others. Amanda Robert White (b. 1893), daughter of white Hunt County owners, picked cotton to get "school clothes money." Other children were not so lucky; their earnings were required for basic family necessities. Hunt County small farmer-owner John A. McCasland avoided committing much of his land to cotton and instead sent his children to pick cotton for others. In this manner, McCasland turned cotton-

picking from a financial cost into an asset with few of the attendant risks and drawbacks associated with a concentration on cotton.³⁹

Cotton-picking time culminated the efforts of the entire year. As the family members picked the cotton, they loaded it into high-sided wagons and hauled it first to the gin and then to the village or town square for examination by the cotton buyer. Here, everything hung in the balance for the year. Here, also, lay the heaviest of the responsibilities usually assigned to men in this culture, the ultimate measure of how one performed in the male economy. The price he was able to get for the year's cotton was the single most important among the factors determining the well-being of the post-subsistence cotton-era farm family. In 1912 the average farm price for middling-quality cotton was a little over twelve cents a pound in Texas. During the preceding ten-year period cotton fluctuated between nine and fifteen cents, but over the preceding two decades cotton averaged only nine-and-a-half cents per pound, with fluctuations as low as a nickel in 1898 and as high as fifteen cents in 1910.⁴⁰

How did the average Hunt County farmer fare in the first decades of the twentieth century? In 1910 the average Hunt County farm consisted of 78.2 acres. Of that amount Hunt County farmers "improved" an average of 74.0 percent of their farms, or 58 acres for the average farmer. Of this crop land, Hunt County farmers put 55.4 percent (32 acres) in cotton. Because of the richness of its soil, Hunt County typically yielded just over a third of a bale (.35) per acre, resulting in a total mean output of eleven bales of cotton per farm (5,500 pounds after ginning). At the two-decade average price of 9.4 cents per pound, the typical farmer ginned about \$517 worth of cotton (\$660 at the 1912 price of 12 cents). About a third of the cotton was seed, of which the farmer usually saved 40 percent and sold the remainder to cover the cost of ginning. Like the rest of the two-thirds of Hunt County farmers who were tenants, the average farmer owed a landlord one-fourth of the cotton, or \$129.25. As the 1910s wore on, it became "in vogue" for landlords to demand one-third of the cotton; in such a case the average Hunt County farmer owed \$172.33 from his cotton. A minority of the share-tenants was "half croppers" and consequently would have owed one-half the value of the cotton. However, most tenants worked "on the thirds and fourths." Assuming this was the case, the average Hunt County tenant farmer earned \$387.75 for the year.⁴¹

In 1910 the average age of a Hunt County farmer was forty. Since the finished farm family in the interview survey averaged eight children, let

us assume that a late thirties farmer's wife of fifteen to twenty years had already given birth to six of her eight children, making a family of eight persons.⁴² If the farm family picked half the cotton and hired the other half picked at the usual pay of 50 cents per hundred pounds (before ginning cotton weighed about three times as much as its final saleable lint), this farmer's labor costs would have been \$41.25, leaving \$346.50.

From this came living expenses. One pair of shoes each for an adult woman, an adult man, and six children of various ages cost about \$8, two pairs of overalls each for four males another \$4, one winter coat for each family member another \$41, four doctors' visits (including a childbirth) another (estimated) \$20—for a total of \$73.⁴³ This left \$273.50.

It took about \$200 worth of store-bought provisions for a typical farm family to "make a crop." A 1914 survey found that the average annual expenditure had been \$259 for all classes of East Texas farmers. Families could get by on less depending on the size of the family, their ability to "live at home," the size of the previous year's cash surplus (if any), and their willingness to suffer. For example, one Fannin County farm family made it through 1907 with a \$145 bank loan, and another survived 1909 on \$137.74. A 1911 survey in the Southeast found that a typical "one horse" African American tenant in cotton country was limited to around \$100 in credit purchases, a miserly limit based no doubt on racial caste. The \$100 limit appears especially draconian considering that \$100 at the credit merchant's store bought nowhere near what \$100 in cash could buy from the same merchant given the normal double-pricing system wherein merchants charged a higher price for individual items sold on credit.⁴⁴

A 1914 University of Texas study showed the average value of crop liens held by credit merchants to be \$72; 40 percent of such debts were for less than \$50. The same survey looked at one national bank and found its crop lien's mean value to be \$221.⁴⁵ But a high percentage of farmers ended the year indebted both to the bank and to the credit merchant, with the latter often taking a second lien.

If the average farm family owed \$200, they owed at least 10 percent interest at the bank, assuming the good fortune of borrowing cash from a bank rather than buying provisions "on the credit" at a furnishing merchant, where interest could be 60 percent or greater. The legal ceiling for interest was 10 percent, and farm notes regularly carried that as the stated rate; however, since banks charged 10 percent of the principal for periods of less than a year (typically from March to October), the actual, illegal, annual rate ran between 12 and 15 percent. Future U.S. Congressman Sam Rayburn co-signed six farm loans for family members

during the years 1907–1909, each for the stated amount of 10 percent annual interest, at rural banks in Fannin County; however, the notes only listed the amount to be repaid and not the amount borrowed, making it impossible to determine if the 10 percent annual interest declared in print on the note was in fact the real rate. It seems unlikely that the omission of the actual principal was an oversight. Most farmers understood, however, that borrowing a fixed sum at a known rate of interest from a bank was far more desirable than patronizing the notorious credit merchant. In 1915 a survey of farmers, merchants, and bankers in eleven East and Central Texas counties showed an average credit price of about 30 percent greater than the same items bought with cash. In deep East Texas' Smith County the average credit price soared 57 percent higher than the cash price. There, researchers compared eleven commonly purchased staple food items and found that in some cases the difference between the lower cash price and the higher credit price was as high as 89 percent. In counties contiguous to Hunt County the situation was somewhat better. Van Zandt County farmers paid an average 21 percent for credit purchases while farmers in Rains County endured credit prices 24 percent higher than cash prices. Rockwall County farmers did better with a credit price average of 11 percent higher than cash prices.⁴⁶ On the other hand, a Lamar County tenant recalled credit prices 60 percent higher than cash prices.⁴⁷ Of course, most farmers preferred to borrow from banks, but banks were not always available, and those that were sometimes proved reluctant to make farm furnishing loans. Often-times unexpected expenses occurred after farmers exhausted the supply of bank credit. In such cases, they might give a second lien on their already mortgaged crop (or implements, stock, and/or land) to the credit merchant.⁴⁸

Fraud posed another potential hazard of dealing with credit merchants. Most farmers kept no record of their dealings with others, and merchants were aware of that. By going into town and opening an account with a credit merchant, farmers were simply placing their trust in the merchant's honesty, thus making themselves vulnerable to outright thievery. Sallie Robinson (b. 1895), daughter of a black Cass County tenant, recalled how her father, an illiterate freedman, was defrauded year after year by the local credit merchants: "They robbed you. They always would write and give my daddy a receipt, you know, for what he had got. You know my daddy didn't have no kind of education. They give him a receipt. He didn't pay no attention to that receipt. They'd throw that receipt down, you know. Then they'd say, 'John, you bring up your

receipt.' Well, my daddy couldn't find no receipt. He done lost it and the man with the receipt got your money." Such fraud was not reserved only for African American farmers. In 1910 tenant farmer Levi Steward had an unusually profitable year only to discover that he owed exactly what he earned to the two local credit merchants, one of them his landlord's son-in-law. Steward was certain he had been defrauded. Some country people believed a particular Hunt County merchant brazenly used his "rainy days" to commit fraud against his farmer credit customers. Knowing that the poor county roads kept rural dwellers away during inclement weather, the credit merchant used this slack time to make fictitious entries into farmers' credit accounts, secure in the knowledge that they kept no records themselves.⁴⁹ Unwary farmers who patronized such a merchant soon found themselves in an unending mire of debt. Borrowing fixed sums from a bank allowed farmers to avoid such traps by making cash purchases only.

After paying off the bank with \$220, the average Hunt County farmer had \$53.50 for the year. This farmer could then look forward to the 1913 season knowing that if he and his family spent \$3.50 on Christmas, suffered no further illnesses that could not be doctored by the wife and mother, incurred no expense maintaining his implements or team, and had spent no money on fertilizer, then he would have \$50.00 toward the approximate \$200 needed to make it to the next cotton harvest. Why such farmers failed to buy land of their own is hardly a mystery.

The root of tenant poverty was no mystery to Dallas landlord J. Tom Padgitt. In Padgitt's opinion the tenant farmer's lack of motivation prevented him from buying his own land. He was something of an expert both on land owning and tenant farming. As an absentee-landlord, he owned 12,000 acres and rented on the shares to dozens of tenant families. Padgitt asserted that the typical tenant had "a very favorable chance" of buying land but only "if he would like to become a home owner."⁵⁰

Padgitt had developed a fine disdain for the general competence of his tenants. Whether at the credit merchant's store, the bank, or the landlord's house, it was with such people that the tenant farmer had to deal at settling-up time. These year-end financial responsibilities must be accorded nearly as much weight as the heavy work of the fields. The years of struggle and worry weighed heavily upon tenant farmers, although perhaps no more heavily than the contempt they sensed in the individuals to whom they were economically bound.

Financially as well as emotionally, however, the most dreaded occurrence was illness. Families first sought the attendance and comfort

of neighbors. But, ultimately, if the situation looked dire enough—especially in the case of children—parents sent for a doctor. Physicians inhabited an ambiguous status with country people. Some trusted and admired their family physicians and saw them as “real pillars in the community.” But doctors were expensive and frequently of unknown competence. Thus, some among the yeomanry distrusted them and self-remedied with a variety of homemade or store-bought potions and salves. Midwifery remained a common practice for childbirths well into the first years of the twentieth century, especially among poor people. Lamar County native William Owens recalls the year of his birth (1905) as “a year of sickness” when rural people came down with a variety of ill-defined ailments including “the dumb chills.” His father began to suffer from a mysterious illness that his wife and mother-in-law tried to cure with double doses of calomel and quinine. In despair, the women called for the local doctor, who made three visits and two diagnoses, first of rheumatism and then of meningitis. Of the latter he averred, “That’s what it is all right. I’ve been reading up on it.” Two more physicians visited. They rendered similar levels of assistance before the patient died. The doctors’ visits required all of the family’s savings right down to the “egg and chicken money” the young widow had hidden away.⁵¹

Small-town doctors often amassed lucrative tenant farms from their practices. Tenant Levi T. Steward recalled how he had once saved enough money to make a down payment on a farm, clearing trees and building a log house and barn. But the next year he lost the place when he surrendered the equity in the farm to pay off the local doctor for four visits. Twelve years later Steward made one last move into the ranks of farm owners, only to be foiled again by doctor’s bills occasioned by the fatal illnesses of two of his children. The unsuccessful healer’s charges, Steward recalled, “cleaned me out.”⁵²

Men’s roles carried them beyond the boundaries of the individual homeplace to the fields and woods and into town, where the outside economic world touched the life of the family. Sometimes women also entered this male-dominated world as single people or as widows, but custom did not favor it.⁵³

Women’s work in the corn field or cotton patch existed in an ambiguous pocket within plain folk culture. Most women had to perform such labor even as their culture condemned it. Those landowning families with the wherewithal to keep the wife and mother out of the field usually tried to do so. Most, however, whether owner or tenant, could not get by without her field work, the kind of work a “lady” was not sup-

posed to perform. This restriction mattered more to some than others. In some families such work was taken for granted while for others it occasioned shame. Almost all small farm-owners and tenant women of “all ethnicities” did field work. The cultural ideal simply could not withstand the economic reality.⁵⁴

Everything families ate or wore came from the hands of their women. Of the southern turn-of-the-century farm Gilbert C. Fite observes, “Practically every activity on the farm involved some work for the women.” For most women, the zone of their responsibilities centered around the homeplace, “the house, yards, garden, orchards and berry patches,” which “constituted the women’s province on the farm.”⁵⁵

Like men’s endeavors, women’s work ran in cycles, too: daily, weekly, and seasonally. Howard recounts in fascinating detail the three-tiered cycle of her mother’s work. Women and girls arose before dawn with their men and began their daily round of chores. The large breakfast eaten by the farm family was the women’s first responsibility of the day. For breakfast women cooked—on wood-burning stoves—biscuits, sausage or bacon, gravy, and eggs, the volume and variety depending on the family’s overall fortunes. After every meal women washed the dishes, no small task when water had to be carried in buckets from an outside well (sometimes a good distance from the house) and heated on a wood-burning stove. The noon meal, dinner, contained considerably more variety in young Dorothy’s prosperous farm household: greens or beans cooked with pork, Irish potatoes mashed with heavy cream and butter, raw vegetables in season (onions, shallots, radishes, and tomatoes), and cornbread (sometimes accompanied by butter and fruit preserves or syrup). Dinner sometimes included meat, depending upon the season: “chicken, ham, beef, squirrel, rabbit and catfish.” This was served with buttermilk or “sweet” milk cooled in “milk coolers” hung inside the well. Again, the dishes and cooking utensils were washed. The evening meal, supper, tended to be lighter, consisting of leftovers from dinner or sliced souse (head cheese), or cornmeal mush. Afterwards, the dishes and utensils were once again washed and put away.⁵⁶

Almost every woman’s household operated on a weekly cycle of tasks as well. Monday seems to have been the preferred wash-day. Laundry was an intensely physical activity on the early-twentieth-century Texas farm, involving an outdoor fire and several large pots. Robert Lee Rice describes his mother’s Monday labors over a “big pot and tubs in the back yard” where she scrubbed the family’s clothing on a rub-board, rinsed them in “blueing water,” and then wrung them out by hand be-

fore hanging them on a clothesline. Other tenant women might have even more primitive laundry practices. Susan Poe Danner (b. 1892), daughter of white Hunt County tenants, recalled that even as a young girl “I was the head of the washing.” This occurred outside in a “big black wash pot” set on bricks. Young Susan Poe had no rub-board. Instead, she stirred and poked with a stick before repeatedly dumping the clothes into a waiting pot of cold water until they were rinsed to her satisfaction. Afterward she hung the clothes on the barbed wire fence around the house, apparently a common practice. Some even hung clothes on nearby bushes.⁵⁷

Tuesday was ironing day in the Mills and Rice households as well as in many others. Ola Chambliss Rice prized her 1903 charcoal-burning iron heater, but those without such a device heated flat-irons on the cook stove and carefully used them with pot holders. On Tuesday in the Mills household Dorothy’s mother ironed everything except the dishcloths. Rice mended and patched clothes on Wednesday, and on Thursday and Friday she sewed, churned, worked the garden, or canned depending on the season. Dorothy’s mother spent Friday baking a week’s supply of “light bread.”⁵⁸

Farm families traveled to town on some Saturdays for marketing and for relief from the isolation of rural life. Rice reports that his mother occasionally accompanied his father to Greenville to peddle her eggs and butter. This varied from family to family, probably influenced by the distance to town. Blanche Amanda Gray recalled that her mother rarely traveled with her father the fifteen miles to Sulphur Springs. One Lamar County tenant woman reported that she “went to town” twice in two years.”⁵⁹

Saturday loomed in importance also as the day of baths. Bessie Pope Looney (b. 1902) recalled having to carry water “from way up west of the house” to be heated on the cook stove. Later, individuals bathed in tubs brought into the kitchen. In the Mills household, the large tub of water was re-used by each bather; thus, it was important to arrange bathers by presumed order of cleanliness. Young girls (least dirty) went first on down to the father (most dirty), since it was apparently assumed that he would be least offended and most benefited by the much-used bath water. Sunday found Mrs. Rice and many women like her back in the kitchen preparing the large Sunday meal for her family and guests. This varied as well, especially depending on the family’s religious leanings. In the Mills home, Dorothy recalled no cooking on Sunday.⁶⁰

Certain women’s tasks, like men’s, had seasonal rhythms. The hand

manufacture of the family's clothing and quilts, canning, and the preparation of special meals occurred according to the natural cycle. Clothes-making consumed much of women's time. Among families with the wherewithal to buy their cloth, purchases were made in the fall and spring for new winter and summer clothes. Less well-off families saved feed and flour sacks for this purpose. Those most affluent, such as Lula Bird Branom's family, could purchase "any kind of beautiful fabric you wanted" in rural stores like those near her home in Cumby, Hopkins County.⁶¹ All of the interviewees had mothers who made at least some of the family's clothing at home.

As fall approached, farm children sometimes picked cotton for neighbors or even those outside the community to be able to afford "school clothes." Of course, children of families in the most straitened circumstances (or with the most dictatorial parents) handed over their cotton-picking money to parents. Still, several interviewees, children of both owners and tenants, reported picking cotton for school clothes.

Town-dwellers reported more of their clothing bought at stores than did the farm children. Most of the town children interviewed came from the ranks of the well-off; their fathers were a merchant, two bankers, and a stock dealer. The working-class representatives also came from the ranks of the secure if not affluent: a constable and stock raiser, a barber, and a railroad employee whose wife also ran a boarding house. Most of the town children's parents bought more "ready made" clothing because they had money incomes and could afford them. Still, even among town-dwellers, women tended to make more of their own clothing and purchase men's clothes.⁶²

The pattern of purchasing ready-made clothing only for males remained true of farm families as well, with some important differences. First, men's clothing purchased by farm families consisted almost exclusively of the simplest, cheapest, and most utilitarian of garments, the denim overall, ordered from the Sears catalogue for between fifty cents and a dollar a pair. Among the interviewees, almost all of children's and women's garments were made at home, along with men's clothing except for jeans, trousers, or overalls. Those families most consciously devoted to self-sufficiency even produced jeans at home.⁶³

Older daughters sometimes assisted mothers in the highly skilled task of sewing. Mattie Self George recalled that her older sister "was a real good hand at sewing" and was able to turn feed and flour sacks into some of their "best things." The cloth flour sacks were especially sought after because they came in appealing colors and prints. Farm women in-

geniously solved the problem of collecting enough of one of the various prints to make a dress by trading for matching pieces with neighbors and friends. Merl Otney Bledsoe Ward recalled, "We didn't have any bought clothes. Mama could make a dress from flour sacks." Mrs. Bledsoe belonged to a club where women met to swap patterns and to "trade for matching flour sacks. It took about three sacks to make a dress. If you had two of one print or of roses and one of another, at the club you could find your missing piece to trade for."⁶⁴

With the onset of winter women's sewing became more specialized. In some families women sewed cloth sausage sacks in anticipation of hog-killing time. Quilting was also done in the winter using the valuable and colorful scraps of past projects. Women sewed by hand over a quilting frame suspended from the ceiling of the main room so that it could be raised up out of the way at the end of the day. Rice not only made quilts but constructed highly prized feather beds, common in farm households, stuffed with feathers from the flock of geese she kept for that purpose.⁶⁵

Women also had seasonal specialties associated with hog killing time. Besides sewing sausage sacks, like most farm women Rice made soap out of "cracklins" by soaking them with water and lye. Young Mattie Self had the task of mixing ground pork with various hot spices to make sausage, which caused her hands to "swell to a strut" each time she performed this task.⁶⁶

Perhaps the single most crucial production of farm women was canning. This process began as soon as the first vegetables matured in the garden. The family could not eat all of each of the many pickings from a good-sized garden, so the only way to save produce for the long winter ahead was through the laborious and hot process of canning. Dorothy Mills's mother and other farm women canned "pole" beans, black-eyed peas, butter beans, lima beans, tomatoes, sauerkraut, beets, pickled cucumbers, and chow-chow (a sweet-and-sour relish made from the last green tomatoes just before the first frost). From the orchard and berry patch Mills canned peaches, peach preserves, peach butter, pickled peaches, blackberries, dewberries, and wild plums. Nora Thrasher's mother, canning for a family of twelve, "put up" vegetables and fruit in half-gallon jars. Many, like Julia Horn McWhirter's family, also dried peaches.⁶⁷

The small farm owner and tenant family succeeded or failed according to the gardening and food preservation activities of their women. John and Mary McCasland's household "bought very few things—flour,

sugar, coffee. Everything else from the garden and orchards." Beulah Bell Nicholson's enterprising mother "didn't buy anything at the store except sugar and flour." In the Mills household store-bought food was rare and consisted mainly of spices, catalysts (baking powder, yeast), or luxuries such as tea, coffee, or sugar. Clifton Peoples recalled that during his early childhood his parents "made a crop on thirty-five dollars. That's the reason we was raising at home. . . . these gardens come in handy."⁶⁸

Not only was the woman's subsistence production crucial, but her operations in the "female economy" of butter, eggs, and poultry sales and barter had been providing security for generations of farm families. The primary link between farm women and the marketplace was embodied in the "chicken peddler."⁶⁹ The chicken peddler toured the countryside with wagon or buggy, sporting compartments holding the household goods and grocery items he traded to farm women, as well as the wire cages and compartments for the live poultry (chickens, guinea hens, turkeys, or geese), eggs, and butter with which the women paid for their purchases. Often commissioned by local merchants, the chicken peddler carried candy, cloth, sewing goods, clothing, cooking ware, "rick-rack," groceries, and spices. He also brought relief from the monotony and loneliness of farm life for women. "I just loved for the chicken peddler to come by," recalled Susan Poe Danner, although "I never did get nothing."⁷⁰

In addition to the chicken peddler farm women sometimes did their own "peddling" to families in town and to local stores. Rice sold eggs and young chickens to customers in Greenville. She, her husband, and some of the children sold butter to individuals and to a grocery store. Over time she developed a regular and loyal clientele. In many cases the female economy saved the family's finances for the year. Blanche Gray's mother raised turkeys to sell: "She sold maybe a hundred dollars worth of turkeys in the fall. That was a lot of money. We could might near, well, we have lived on a hundred dollars a year." How much of the money or resources brought in by women remained under their control probably varied from family to family. Observed Susan Danner, "The men was the boss. Men's always been the boss." In her family the womenfolk did not have much discretionary money except for "hid money."⁷¹

Among the most prosperous farm families with enough land-holdings to produce an actual profit from cotton, the importance of this female economic role diminished. Further, such prosperous families looked askance at the chicken peddler and the quality of his wares, which Lula Bird Branom's mother found "kind of poor."⁷²

But even among the farmers whom historian Gilbert C. Fite calls the “middle class” of southern agriculture, women had to work hard every day under normal conditions. In fact, Fite argues that life “was hardest for southern farm women” and that they “worked longer and harder” than did men on the early-twentieth-century farm, yet “enjoyed the least recreation and social life.”⁷³

Specialization in cotton production, especially among tenants, eroded the subsistence role traditionally played by farm women. One angry observer claimed that “four-fifths of the labor performed in Texas is devoted to the cotton crop” with the result that the typical farm family “lives on less . . . has less to eat, less clothing, [and] less amusement” than Mexican peasants. Not only were farm women devoting more of their time to cotton field work, but tenants were finding the hope of subsistence production increasingly dim as blackland landlords demanded that cotton rows run right up to the house.⁷⁴

Compared to the sumptuous tables set by farm women like Mills and Rice, women on half-cropper farms had to expend most of their energies elsewhere. Beulah Steward recalled in 1915 that during her family’s long and unsuccessful struggle to climb the agricultural ladder most of her attention was focused on cotton. “I made a hand every year,” the mother of eleven reported. This included spending the first six months of her pregnancies planting corn and cotton and chopping cotton. She served a scanty breakfast at four o’clock in the morning, then joined her husband in the field until eleven o’clock, at which time she returned to the house to prepare the noon meal. “If we had any vegetables, I would have them vegetables, if I had time to cook them. I could not cook vegetables every day when I was working in the field, but I did once in a while.” She listed only six items in her relatively meager garden, and “we generally bought our meat.” One Hill County farmer described for a 1914 interviewer how debt forced him to shrink subsistence production and increase his family’s cotton-growing efforts to meet his financial obligation. Consequently, the family began to purchase more of their year’s provisions since both the land and time needed for subsistence production was tied up with cotton. Of course, the farmer had entered a long and vicious cycle: the more cotton he grew to pay off his debt, the more food he had to buy, the more food he bought, the larger his debt became.⁷⁵ Cotton took women away from their traditional and critical home production, without which the plain folk could not retain their independence.

Scarce recreation and leisure usually revolved around visiting with

other families, special celebratory occasions, and the pastimes of children. The chief practitioners of recreational activities were children too young for field work or older school-age youngsters enjoying seasonal respite from their field-hand responsibilities. For many, school itself, with its opportunity for visiting and physical rest, seemed like recreation to these hard-working young people. On the other hand, there were children among the rural poor majority who had as little leisure and play as their hard-pressed parents. In fact, childhood recreation was not a given; those children allowed the luxury of play had parents willing (or simply able) to afford them a childhood. There was little play time in the childhood of young Eunice Odale Jones (b. 1912), daughter of a white Dallas County owner. In her sixteen-member family the children “mostly worked” and “at night you were tired and you went to sleep.”⁷⁶

Texas farm children played many of the same games as other early-twentieth-century American children. These usually featured outdoor exertions and contests of speed, agility, and cleverness. Few activities involved toys. One tenant child spoke for many, if not most, when she remarked that she had never had a toy. Favorite games included hide and seek, jump rope, hop scotch, and marbles. Perhaps the overall favorite of farm children regardless of race or class was baseball; white and black children of owners and tenants relished the memories of their games of “country baseball,” which provided the allure both of competition and fellowship. Tom F. Washington, son of a black Hopkins County owner, fondly recalled the summer evenings spent playing baseball in the “kinfolk community” of East Caney when neighbors and relatives gathered to visit “and might near ever[y] house had a ball grounds.” The interviewees also rode horses, told stories, captured lightning bugs in fruit jars, and played rag ball. They also told of playing games called “Indian,” “Annie Over,” “Ring around the Roses,” “Wolf over the River,” and “Stinkbase.”⁷⁷

Older children and teenagers had parties. Those most socially confident tended to host the gatherings, which usually consisted of dances, euphemistically called “play parties” by adherents of anti-dancing denominations. But as others have observed of rural southerners, their urge to dance was older and stronger than their attachment to the prohibitions of their various sects. These parties usually occurred in the winter months when rural dwellers most needed relief from isolation. Such parties included adults as a general rule, although young single people looked forward to them with greater urgency since drinking (water) from the same dipper or gourd sparked “many a romance.” The yeoman com-

munity expected and enforced inclusive egalitarian practices, strictly forbidding the “picking” of some guests over others. Owens writes that such parties had no “class limit” and that “no person in a typical rural community would presume to have a select group at a party.” When a newly arrived snob failed to meet this expectation and “picked” a select group of invitees, the next day one of her family’s geese appeared, completely featherless, with a sign attached that read: “One picked party, one picked goose, the next time you pick, we’ll pick the whole flock.”⁷⁸

This country egalitarianism extended within the hosts’ home as well. The leaders for the “games” were selected on the strength of their singing, “shabby clothes” and low social standing notwithstanding. The same welcome extended to fiddle players in the homes of the less religiously inhibited. Parties lucky enough to have a fiddler enjoyed breakdowns, reels, and other folk favorites. At the more respectable “play parties,” the “games” consisted of the party-goers singing, clapping, and stomping rhythmically to substitute for musical instruments. Young people especially enjoyed “Snap,” “Clap In and Clap Out,” and “Jutang.”⁷⁹

Adults had less leisure and opportunity for a social life than children. Lula Bird Branom believed her parents’ only pastime was working. “They taken a pride in what they did.” Likewise, Merl Otney Bledsoe Ward could not recall her Hunt County tenant father having pastimes. “Papa worked from sun-up til sun-down.”⁸⁰ For men, and the women who sometimes accompanied them, “going to town” on monthly marketing trips provided one source of recreation and the opportunity for socializing.

The chief adult recreational activity consisted of visiting friends or relatives. Sometimes in the evenings neighbors would gather at the north Hunt County tenant farm of Eli Self and “set til bedtime,” occasionally bringing a fiddle along. Usually visits were saved for the weekends; extended visits might begin after work on Saturday, and the visiting family would stay until Sunday evening. The men played dominoes and talked, occasionally joined by the womenfolk. More likely the women kept their own counsel in the kitchen, especially since even when the men took time off from work, the business of preparing, serving, and cleaning up after meals went on for the women. In the evenings families and their guests sang church songs, played more dominoes, and told stories; in some cases, the men might saunter discreetly behind the barn for a drink of corn whiskey or home brewed beer.⁸¹ Sunday dinner made up another opportunity for socializing. Overnight guests, fellow worshippers, and sometimes the local preacher would be invited.

Nora Thrasher recalled that her twelve-member family usually received visitors but rarely “went calling” themselves because of the size of their family and the desire not to unduly burden a host. Nevertheless, they were visited frequently by family and friends; the adults “fixed ice cream” while the children chased lightning bugs. Visiting neighbors and relatives coming for overnight stays was by far the single most popular adult pastime mentioned by the interviewees. It was not, however, the only form of adult entertainment available. Clifton Peoples’s parents enjoyed “church work” and church picnics. Ocie Miller Moxley’s parents attended “sing-songs” in friends’ homes and in the local church. In addition to visiting friends and relatives Tom Washington’s parents enjoyed revival meetings at the East Caney Baptist Church. Julie Horn McWhirter and Willie Clowp Jeter recalled that their parents played dominoes or “forty-two.”⁸²

Those who cared little for their reputations among the church people availed themselves of the other two prime recreations of dancing and drinking. Church-goers considered dance parties, at least those that advertised themselves as such, somewhat risqué. The threat of church discipline provided a further disincentive.⁸³ Nevertheless, such parties were in fact common and even attended, occasionally, by the more adventurous of the respectable sort. Bessie Pope Looney recalled going to a dance with her otherwise dependably religious Church of Christ mother and father. Her mother was “happy and dancing” while a horrified Bessie sat in a corner and wept in shame and grief that her mother was the kind of woman who could enjoy such a sinful pleasure.⁸⁴

Hunting and fishing occupied the dual positions of both a treasured leisure activity and a valuable means of providing the family with food. Hunting was almost exclusively a male pastime, while both sexes participated in fishing, although not on an equal footing given the almost constant nature of women’s work. Nevertheless, Eddie Curtis Williams (b. 1890), son of black Camp County tenants, and Mattie Self George each remembered their mothers’ fishing prowess. While young Mattie’s father took Saturday afternoons off to swim in a nearby creek with the children, Ella Self fished upstream, enjoying both the sport and the time away from her six children. Hunting consisted of two disparate activities. First, men and boys hunted game for food, for the value of their hides, and also as a leisure activity. Second, men and boys “hunted” with hounds and other lesser breeds for the pleasure of listening to the dogs baying after the game. Mack Hume (b. 1900), son of white Hopkins County owners, recalled his youthful attachment to hunting: “That was

my delight. Back in them days there wasn't no laws against anything." When young Mack asked for shotgun shells, his foster father readily supplied them because "he knowed I's gonna get some squirrel. A timbered branch ran through the place and that's where the squirrels lived." In the winter young Mack trapped "possum": "that's where I got my spending money." The men around Dorothy Mills Howard's childhood home in the Sabine River bottom of Rains and Hunt counties sometimes went on "week-long fishing and hunting trips to Caddo Lake."⁸⁵

In the hard-working lives of rural poor people special occasions loomed large as times of celebration, fellowship, and a break in the work. The arrival of most of these celebrations and special occasions was cyclical, governed by the seasons and long-held customs.

Some occasions, like weddings, might defy prediction and occur whenever the mood struck the couple. William Owens's mother and step-father-to-be simply rode off in his rented buggy while Owens's grandmother informed the children that "they had gone off to find a preacher to marry them." Their spontaneity did not prevent the young men and boys of the community from seizing the moment to celebrate. Owens describes the couple's wedding-night shivaree as good-natured, though somewhat rough, harassment. "Late in the night, when all was quiet, a shotgun went off under the part of the house where I was sleeping. . . . [T]he house and yard was full of sounds of men running and yelling and banging on sweeps. Around the house they went, with guns blasting, cowbells ringing." Eventually the visitors laid down their guns and plow sweeps and stood in line to shake hands with the couple, extend their congratulations, and receive "candy and tea cakes from the store."⁸⁶

The first of the seasonal occasions for the rural plain folk was Easter. This church-centered celebration often included an Easter egg hunt for the children, a big meal, and an occasion for new dresses or bonnets.⁸⁷

After the crops had been laid by and the heat of summer raised the temperature in creeks, revivals began and ran all through the summer with baptisms peaking near the end of the season. Howard remembers these "protracted meetings" as part of the yearly cycle she eloquently chronicles, coming as they did between midsummer and harvest time.⁸⁸ At young Merl Bledsoe's community, the Baptists and Methodists held shared "tabernacle" summer revivals where one always carried a palmetto fan as an article of survival. Only the "Campbellites," she recalled, stayed away.⁸⁹

At the summertime country revivals there occurred much singing,

preaching, crying, and praying. Among the newly formed Holiness congregations there might even be shouting, dancing, and speaking in tongues. In fact, according to historian Ted Ownby, all of the plain folk sects occasionally produced “outbursts of emotions” in revival meetings with “only the Presbyterians too sedate to take part.” Almost everyone in a community attended, either to seek salvation, court, visit, gawk at those on the mourners’ bench, or slip into the nearby woods for a drink of whiskey. Owens describes the conversion of a formerly recalcitrant and “stiff-necked” sinner at a Lamar County Baptist summer revival where, after much persuading, the man approached the mourners’ bench accompanied by “the preacher, the deacons, the sisters, and brethren” who prayed and wept until “wet with sweat” exhaustion and salvation arrived simultaneously. Following a round of conversions, country preachers performed baptisms in the nearest available creek or pond.⁹⁰

Juneteenth also supplied the countryside with a distinctively Texas summer celebration. In the early twentieth century rural black Texans celebrated Juneteenth (June 19) in commemoration of the announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas in 1865. Clifton Peoples recalled the Juneteenth celebrations of his Hopkins County youth: “Back there we celebrated it good. We’d have ball games, picnics, a big stew.” In south Hunt County around the Donelton and Williams Chapel communities Joe D. Wallace (b. 1907), son of white Hunt County owners, recalled large Juneteenth celebrations hosted by Manuel Maloney, “a wealthy old black man who owned a lot of land there.” Maloney hosted a “free barbecue for ever’body,” including Wallace and his family.⁹¹

As summer came to an end the long hard days of harvest took away the people’s leisure time and the extra energy required for special occasions. Then, after crop gathering time, the temperature began to drop, and the farm people began looking forward to the next big event, hog-killing day. Farm children like Dorothy Mills and most of the interviewees remembered the excitement of hog-killing day with fondness. The family larder was restocked for the coming winter, neighbors came to visit and work, and children played with hog bladder balloons.⁹²

And, according to Howard, about the time their hog-bladder balloons finally broke, farm children could start dreaming of the single most important occasion of the year: Christmas. The interviewees held pleasant memories of childhood Christmas celebrations. The common thread running through their remembrances was the wild glee with which they greeted the smallest of gifts from their parents: store-bought hard candy, apples, oranges, and nuts made up the typical Christmas present re-

ceived by the children of the rural poor majority. Owners' children were more apt to receive a toy or doll in addition to the candy and fruit, but this certainly was no given. The daughter of white Kaufman County owners, Estelle Cunningham (b. 1889), always received candy and enjoyed the family feast but never got Christmas "presents": "We did not know what a toy was." Other owners' children sometimes received an inexpensive item such as a small doll, a toy pistol, slingshots, or a toy wagon, along with the requisite candy and fruit.⁹³ In spite of the expense and worries of parents, many enjoyed the excitement of their children during the Christmas season. Jim and Vessa Washington, black Hopkins County owners, worked up their children's excitement to the point that the younger Washingtons scoured the inside of the family's chimney, hoping to ease Santa Claus's descent.⁹⁴

Tenant children fared worse. Susan Danner never received a toy for Christmas. Others, like Mattie Self George, received practical items such as shoes. Willie Clowp Jeter once got a cheap "china doll" whose limbs were made of thin glass. Soon one of the toy's feet broke off. Thereafter, she remembered sadly, she had to make do with a one-footed doll. She voiced her other memories of Christmas presents with a correspondingly bleak "never got much." Other tenant children had more bountiful Christmases. Black Hopkins County tenants Matt and Sallie Peoples provided their thirteen children with memorable presents of "little trucks, little wagons, pop guns, little airplanes, little things like that, you know." Their son Clifton grew up with warm memories of that season: "Christmas was wonderful. . . . Gettin' toys, all that, candies and applies. It was beautiful."⁹⁵

Two Christmas memories provided by two tenant children perfectly illustrate the importance of that holiday in the lives of country poor people. Mattie Self George's tenant parents, Eli and Ella Self, were in the habit of providing exciting and joyous Christmases with candy, fruit, and small toys for their six children. "Daddy went to town Christmas Eve day with a long sack. He got it full of fruit and I always got a doll and the boys got toys." Their excitement would mount when "we'd see Daddy coming home with it." Then came the disastrous year 1902 when their crops were all short due to a sandstorm that hit their tenant farm near Abilene in northwest Texas. That December the Selfs set out to return to eastern Texas, eventually settling in Hunt County. Christmas 1902 caught them on the move, just outside of Denton, carrying all of their possessions in one covered wagon pulled by a team of mules. Upon reaching the wagon yard her father immediately sold his team to the

wagon yard man and bought his children shoes for Christmas. Mattie remembered plenty of good food that night in the “camp house” the family shared with a collection of other tenant families on the move. The camp house was a huge barn-like structure used for shelter by families “parked” in the wagon yard. It had bunk beds and a large double fireplace that opened out to the open room on both sides. That night “everybody had their fiddles,” and the families huddled together and managed to have a festive Christmas Eve. Mattie was ten years old.⁹⁶

Merl Bledsoe Ward recalled a memorable Christmas on her parents’ Hunt County tenant farm. “One Christmas the crop was so short that they couldn’t give us any presents.” C. W. and Carey Glenn Bledsoe prepared their two sons and three daughters for a Christmas morning with no gifts by honestly describing their situation. According to Ward, the children told their parents a giftless Christmas “would be just fine.” On Christmas Eve, however, “Papa took a tow-sack of potatoes and corn and set off down the railroad tracks to Cooper and traded it for bananas, nuts, oranges, and candy. Boy, I’ll tell you, we had a picnic. . . . We didn’t know but what we was well-off.”⁹⁷

For farm families living in close-knit or stable communities, Christmas consisted of a two-tiered celebration: first a family Christmas, then a community Christmas at church and in each others’ homes. The family celebration usually included a Christmas tree, sometimes included visiting relatives, and always revolved around a feast. Bessie Pope Looney recalled a Christmas when her parents discovered that visiting cousins would have no gifts of their own. Bessie’s parents elected to have their children share their already meager gifts with their cousins in order for each child to feel included. Looney reported that her father was despondent at the prospect of taking away half of his children’s gifts to give to his sister’s children; she asserted, however, that she and her siblings loved their cousins so much that they happily obliged.⁹⁸

Feasts and family visits ranked high in the Christmas memories of the interviewees. A bountiful table was one Christmas luxury affordable to all but the most desperately poor. Julie Horn McWhirter’s mother and sisters “cooked everything they could think of.” Jimmy D. Williams, son of black Hopkins County owners, remembered that his mother would make several pounds of butter and then “put them back” until they were “rank.” “That’s what she cooked with for Christmas.” The “rank” butter gave his mother’s Christmas cakes and pies an extra rich taste. Merl Bledsoe Ward’s mother always served “turkey and dressing and pies” for their family’s Christmas dinner. William Owens’s impoverished family

loaded the makings of a Christmas feast in their wagon when they set out to spend Christmas with an aunt one year. Gertrude Venus Jones (b. 1898), daughter of white Hunt County tenants, remembered Christmas as a “great day” with visits from her mother’s brothers.⁹⁹

Many otherwise sober householders took a nip or two of eggnog during the Christmas season. Mack Hume recalled that his adoptive father (whom he referred to as “the old gen’leman”) “always got hisself two quarts of whiskey.” Mack and his foster mother (“the old lady”) would add only enough whiskey to the homemade eggnog “for taste,” but “the old gen’leman” made his own “considerably stronger.” William Owens’s uncles dared to drink whiskey on Christmas Eve in the presence of their mildly disapproving wives and mother-in-law. After becoming sufficiently inebriated, they indulged themselves and the children in another Christmastime favorite: fireworks. When they used up the last of the Roman candles and firecrackers, the men seized their shotguns and blasted away all of their squirrel hunting ammunition, resulting in anxious womenfolk, children hiding under the house, and a badly damaged front gate “drilled and splintered by shot.” In the end, the men were duly forgiven, the incident treated by the women as an inevitable accompaniment to Christmas. After discovering the ruined gate the next morning, Owens’s uncle remained philosophical: “Christmas ain’t Christmas without a hot toddy.” Young Mack Hume also enjoyed Christmas because of the availability of fireworks. “That was when I had my big time.” He trapped and sold “possum” hides to accumulate the purchase price of the firecrackers that he shared with the neighboring tenant’s son. For young Mack another favorite aspect of the season was the practice of having a “community Christmas.”¹⁰⁰

Community Christmases usually began at the church. Gwendolyn Cox King remembered the “community Christmas tree” at the Fairlie, Hunt County, Methodist Church. “Oh, it was just wonderful. Everybody had a gift.” Each family placed their children’s presents on the “community” tree, most consisting of fruit or other small items. As the children of the congregation eagerly waited, each child was called forward to receive her or his gift from the tree.¹⁰¹

Country people were loath to end the celebratory season. After the church community Christmas and the family’s Christmas Day feast, neighbors sometimes took turns hosting Christmas dinners for several days following. Recalled Mack Hume, “After Christmas, neighbors got together for Christmas dinners. The dinners always started with the old gen’leman and old lady where I lived” in spite of the fact that there

“wasn’t ‘ere house over half a mile.” The next night the neighbors went to “the renter’s house,” then each home per night for the first week after Christmas.¹⁰² For children especially, the year might seem a long series of special occasions where even the mundane, if accompanied by visiting and feasting, took on a celebratory hue.

Such Christmas celebrations, along with other aspects of these people’s lives, serve to emphasize the cohesion present within the yeoman community. In their emphasis on common tastes in food, the central and equalizing place of work, common household economic experiences, commonly accepted sex roles, and in their common pastimes and celebrations, small farm owners and tenants were cut from the same cultural cloth. Subcultures abounded. By the early twentieth century southerners lived in a three-hundred-year-old laboratory of cultural exchange where the environment braided together the British heritage of the majority with the West African heritage of the single largest minority, touched both with influences emanating from Cherokees, Choctaws, Germans and others, to produce a sectional way of life whose particularities did not exceed its commonalities. Nevertheless, a larger, common culture predominated among the country poor majority.

CHAPTER 5

"THE SAME CLASS OF PEOPLE"

Cohesion and Conflict

In the midst of a transformed economic landscape, the rural poor majority continued to hold to a set of community-centered values. Yet, the yeomanry's way of life consisted of a set of behaviors, not just beliefs and values. So while rural people persisted in idealizing neighborly values, their ability to practice those values shrunk with each passing year, disappearing along with widespread economic independence.

The yeomanry's sense of community; its persistence; its character, divisions, and limits; and the pressures upon it are revealed in a variety of attitudes, behaviors, and economic forces common in the early-twentieth-century countryside: beliefs about the responsibilities and obligations of neighbors, attitudes about social and economic class, beliefs about race, and the reality of social and geographical mobility. Turn-of-the-century Texas rural communities may be seen as falling somewhere along a continuum representing the most cohesive and stable communities at one end and the least cohesive and stable at the other. Regarding class divisions, they may be divided into three broad categories: the most cohesive high-ownership "kinfolk communities" paid little attention to class, "intermediate communities" were still cohesive but with some acknowledgement of class distinctions, and in the least cohesive high-tenancy pseudo-communities economic class conflict prevailed. In the latter two, members of stable kin networks lived alongside geographically mobile tenants so that two different social communities

shared the same geographic location. In every community racial division was paramount.

When used here *community* is meant to indicate two different things. First, it refers to the people of a culture that existed across the American South: the plain folk community. Second, it denotes clusters or settlements of people with enough proximity to engage in regular interaction: Pleasant Valley, Clinton, Williams' Chapel. A community might have a store, gin, or post office but assuredly contained a church building—sometimes shared by the two largest denominations—and a cemetery. Farms spread into the surrounding countryside, and whether or not families considered themselves members of one community or the next depended on distance, terrain and natural boundaries, and, most of all, custom.¹

Kinfolk communities revolved around a set of long-term landowners whose families had intermarried sufficiently so that by 1910 the community consisted of a set of extended cousin networks. These communities represented the earlier period of semi-subsistence production in Texas and the South and persisted longest in the areas of less fertile, cheaper land such as in the sandy soil of East Texas where the soil's perceived poverty preserved the possibility for widespread ownership. Share renting and cropping could be found in these communities but of a kind "normally" found in agrarian societies. In Texas young white people and freedmen had made up this pre-cotton tenant class.²

Examples of kinfolk communities represented by the interviewees in this work included the two Hopkins County sandyland locales of East Caney (black) and Reilly Springs (white). Tom F. Washington was born and raised in East Caney: "We had what you call a kinfolks' community here. Some people'd move in there that wasn't any kin. Wasn't long before they was kin because they'd marry in." Blanche Gray's kinfolk community of Reilly Springs spanned generations and distance, having been settled by cousins and other distant kin from a similar community in Mississippi.³

Of course, such stable, long-term kinfolk communities also could be found in Central Texas. Historian Thad Sitton describes the erstwhile communities he investigated in Bell and Coryell counties as "mutual aid communities, domains of neighborliness, face-to-face societies" which operated both "in the spirit of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood but also in the full knowledge that next time their families might be the ones needing help."⁴

Intermediate communities had a mixture of landowners and long-

term tenants and long-term relationships, familial and otherwise. Hunt County, especially its eastern half, contained such places. Here, the plain folk community persisted, even though the majority no longer owned their own land. There existed more class tension here than in the kinfolk community but not at the level apparent in the pseudo-community. The contrasting types of relationships that tended to exist between the farmer-landlords and their neighbor-tenants on the one hand and that between absentee town-dwelling landlords and their tenants on the other, typified both the cohesions and divisions co-existing in the intermediate community.

The pseudo-community followed from concentration of land ownership and tenant geographic mobility. The pseudo-community might or might not have a core of small landowners. More than likely the overwhelming majority worked on shares for one or a few large absentee-landowners represented by professional managers. Most of these hard-pressed cotton-producers stayed one year, or two, and then moved on. This geographical mobility worked against the formation of those necessities for community that allowed even the intermediate community to practice vestiges from the yeoman past. The main missing ingredient was trust born of long association. And, simply, the ever-present fact of geographical mobility itself weakened one of the major regulatory factors influencing behavior in the old community: the daunting effect of negative community sanction. Even when sharecroppers on the vast absentee holdings were farmers of long tenure, the possibilities for community were corrupted by the immense power imbalance represented by the absentee owner or his agents. Tenants could not practice the liberty-loving, community-building way of life their fathers and mothers had taken for granted. Their places were not their own. The prime example in Hunt County was the so-called King Ranch—a 2,300-acre cotton plantation, not the much larger and famous King Ranch of South Texas lore—located in the rich blackland western part of the county. In 1912 managers ran the operation for the town-dwelling owner Vivian King, the largest landowner in Hunt County, whose \$160,725 in holdings was 115 times greater than the county average. Dozens of tenant families labored on its rich flat acres, including the family of young Hyatt Cheek. The managers ordered Cheek's father to plant over 80 percent of his farm in cotton. Hyatt remembers the managers as people not to be trifled with. Even under the most benign administrations, occupying a home at the sufferance of landlords or their agents foreclosed independence and its accompanying community-strengthening virtues.⁵

While all three types of communities co-existed at roughly the same time, they can also be seen as occurring along a chronological continuum. In other words, communities grew toward the pseudo-community. The kinfolk community represented the self-sufficient, landowning past; next came the intermediate state with uneven pockets of communitarian relationships within a wider setting that could not practice community as before; and, finally, the mature expression of the new economy, the pseudo-community wherein each family sank or swam alone, married to the landlord and their fellow tenants only through economic ties. In the pseudo-community, the landlord held broad powers, sometimes including what got preached on Sunday mornings.⁶

The traditional yeoman community evinced a strong attachment to the idea of equality. This did not, to be sure, extend to levels of wealth. But in their view of the good society, everyone had a chance for ownership of some land—not the same amount of land—and thus a shot at independence. This culture carried little negative criticism of wealth by itself; the plain folk did, however, frown upon displays of conspicuous consumption as evidenced in the case of one late-nineteenth-century Hunt County farmer. Smitten by a neighboring spinster, the man purchased a new harness and buggy to go courting, but fearful that he would “appear flashy,” he “refrained from using all the new things together until the new wore off.”⁷

While the yeomanry had little patience with putting on airs, wealth, if worn properly, was admirable. They especially respected wealth used in defense of an underdog, as in the case of one Delta County tenant. Landowners Andy and Martha Morgan lived near their sharecropping tenants, the Johnson family. Finding herself out of flour, Martha Morgan sent a child to borrow a small amount from the nearby tenants; the sharecroppers’ flour (bought from a local credit merchant) proved to be of such low quality that the Morgans found it inedible. An angry Andy Morgan sternly admonished the merchant for supplying inferior flour to the tenant family—bound to the merchant’s store by credit arrangements—and demanded that thereafter the merchant make no distinctions between the Morgans and the Johnsons. The sharecroppers’ son recalled, “The poor class had to take what they could get, and the rich class got the best. But that was not Andy Morgan’s philosophy. He believed in treating everyone the same. That’s the kind of man he was.”⁸

Morgan typified the egalitarian ideal professed by the plain folk and strongly reiterated by their children among the interviewees. Interviewee assertions of rural egalitarianism can be measured in a limited

way by questions about the tenure status of their closest friends and those of their parents. While the answers offer no ultimate definition for farming people's attitudes toward class, the results can be seen as a rough guide. The answers to objective questions about their closest friends' tenure status generally corroborated their assertions of the yeomanry's egalitarianism. Of the eleven owner children responding, six reported that their own friends were made up entirely of fellow landowners' children, but the other five reported that their friends included tenant children. Among the children of tenants the results were similarly mixed. Of the six responding, two reported that their friends were all owners, two claimed their friends were all tenants, and two asserted that they had friends in both groups. A slightly greater degree of cleavage appeared among adults, although not dramatically so. Among owners, five out of eight reported parents' friends were all landowners, while three asserted that their parents' circle included both owners and tenants. Among tenant children responding, two of three asserted that all of their parents' friends were also tenants while one claimed their parents' friends came from both groups.

Most informants insisted that in the countryside itself the rural majority made few distinctions between farmer-owners and farm tenants. Tellingly, however, assertions of egalitarianism were most prevalent among the sons and daughters of the small owners. Sometimes the tenants were less sure of such equal standing, but on the whole, tenant children agreed that inside rural communities class distinction was minimal. Owners' daughter Eunice Jones Ewalt described neighbor tenants as "just good country people." Owners' daughter Blanch Gray's family raised her to believe that "one's just as good as the other." R. D. Bell (b. 1911), son of black Hopkins County owners, asserted that no social distinctions existed between owners and renters, especially among his age group. "Kids of croppers and owners were all the same; we had a lot of that [sharecropping]." Similarly, Tom F. Washington characterized his community as a socially egalitarian place. Small farm owner William T. Davis of Coleman County typified the kinship between small owners and tenants. One of Davis's sons worked on shares, and several of his daughters married cotton renters. Davis considered his sharecropping neighbors "hard-working . . . honest, truthful men."⁹

A 1914 survey conducted by the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College found many rural landowners expressing sympathetic solidarity with their tenant neighbors, even sharing tenants' anger at injustices they believed tenants regularly endured. Such farmer-owners often scoffed at

the New South boosters' notion of the "agricultural ladder," which held that a young farmer, through thrift and industry, could rise from tenancy to landownership. Asked if he could have earned enough to purchase his present farm by renting it on thirds and fourths, a Smith County farmer-owner retorted, "No man can do it anywhere in East Texas." An eighty-six-year-old retired farmer-owner in Van Zandt County believed that the number of sharecroppers increased because of the "high price of land, [the] credit system, and all-cotton farming." Another Van Zandt County farmer-owner blamed tenants' inability to own land on their greedy landlords for "requiring renters to plant so much cotton." A Hill County farmer-owner knew firsthand the life of a sharecropper, and although he had, through "stingy living," achieved landownership, he did not romanticize the process and asserted that he would prefer his children "remain renters" than to have the life experiences he and his wife had endured in order to own land. A fellow Hill County landowner, age seventy-nine, observed that tenants must work every third or fourth day, not for themselves, but "for the privilege of living on the earth." This old agrarian found the notion of land rental preposterous and explained the increase in tenancy as the result of "oppression of the people by the money power."¹⁰

Four of the thirty-two farm interviewees were children of farmer-landlords. Their attitudes did not vary from the group as a whole. Mack Hume said of his parents' renters that they were "common ordinary people" as a way of affirmation. Gwendolyn Cox King, daughter of north Hunt County farmer-landlord John Wesley Cox, remembered cordial relations between her father and his nearby tenant John Rowe. She and Rowe's daughter were friends, and she recalled the family of fellow Methodists as "nice people." Regarding social differences based on class, King stated flatly, "We never heard of anything like that." Charles McCasland's Socialist father, southwest Hunt County farmer-landlord John A. McCasland, might have been expected to teach egalitarianism, and he did. He also had tenants but taught young Charles to see them as "just like the rest of us." Amanda Robert White, whose grandfather owned a 1,100-acre farm in southwest Hunt County, grew up believing that tenants were "good people." A Collin County landlord situated just west of the Hunt County line operated an 800-acre farm that included a number of sharecropping families and remarked in 1915 that "I do not see any difference between the renters and the landowners."¹¹

Some of the rural Central Texas subjects interviewed for *Harder than Hardscrabble: Oral Recollections of Farming Life from the Edge of the Texas*

Hill Country remarked on community cohesion between neighbors as well. One said of his farming community that "everybody was pretty much the same. They farmed, they raised cotton and corn and some kind of crop to feed their animals through the winter." According to another, "the neighbors, they wasn't rich people and poor people, they's all poor. Even the rich ones was poor."¹²

North Hunt County farmer-owner's daughter Ocie Miller Moxley recalled the presumed equality in her rural community between owners and tenants: "They were just all in the same class of people, or we accepted them that way. Because in our little neighborhood, ever'body was just kind of equal, more or less. You didn't think about a class being higher than anybody else. Ever'body went—if they didn't go to your church, they went to the other church. I don't remember any distinctions."¹³ Moxley's comment also illustrates the role of the country church in blurring class lines and building community. Baptists, Methodists, and other plain folk sects cast a wide loop where class was concerned. Furthermore, because ministers were scarce and people tended to enjoy each other's company more than they clung to doctrinal purity, congregations often shared buildings and sometimes services.¹⁴ South Hunt County farmer-owner's son Joe D. Wallace said much about both cohesion and its limits within the rural poor majority when he said of neighboring tenants: "They was white people just like us."¹⁵

Moses Abraham Warren (1857–1951) owned and farmed a 66-acre diversified farm in north Hunt County. His son clearly recollected his father's attitude toward tenants. According to Fletcher Warren (b. 1896), Moses Warren believed that neighboring tenants were, like himself, "just trying to make a living." He said, "We didn't think much in terms of somebody's [status]. He was a good neighbor or he wasn't a good neighbor. Or, you liked him or you didn't like him. You liked him if he was friendly, and if he came over and wanted to borrow a plow or something else, you let him have it. . . . I don't remember my dad ever saying anything against a tenant farmer because he was someone who wasn't as well off as my father, so he had to be a sharecropper or tenant farmer, making a living. And that was the main thing—to make a living. And, dad would've looked on a sharecropper as simply someone that was having an even harder time than he'd had. No, all of us were too close to the subsistence level."¹⁶ Children of landowners found it easier than tenant children to assert the egalitarian ideal.

Mattie Self George remembered her tenant farmer parents as proud and competent people. Neighbors relied upon her father, Eli Self

(1843–1923), as a folk veterinarian and all-around “fixer.” When a neighbor’s mule came down with the “blind staggers, they called my daddy instead of the horse doctor.” Only the unwise would have attempted to treat Eli Self as anything other than a social equal: “He’d a said, ‘Boy, do you want your guts cut out?’” Willie Clowp Jeter believed that her tenant father “always liked his landlords.”¹⁷ Questioned directly about this issue, almost all of the tenant interviewees expressed the ideal of equality. In practice, children of tenants understood that in spite of the ideal, their parents in fact inhabited an inferior economic position and some, Mattie George and Hyatt Cheek among them, admitted to the discomfort that occasioned.¹⁸

Because of its universality in the plain folk community, work itself acted as a sort of interclass social glue. William Owens writes of being a hired hand on a small farm in Lamar County where he worked, ate, and slept beside the owner’s son. In some respects the family treated him as a hired hand, but his status was more complicated than that. The family’s mother and daughters extended small acts of comfort and affection as if he were a guest or relative. His employers did not find the work he did demeaning because they, and everybody they knew, performed the same work. Thus, the very work undertaken by small owners, tenants, and farm laborers alike offered a potential bond.¹⁹

Community bonds grew especially strong through the experience of cooperative work, and mutual need demanded cooperative work. Ocie Moxley’s north Hunt County neighbors regularly “switched work” with one another as circumstances demanded. This practice was also common among the western Hunt County blackland farmers observed by banker Horace M. Mathews (1827–1935). Oftentimes they would “go together and swap labor,” especially during threshing. Lula Bird Branom recalled growing up among close-knit farm folk in nearby Hopkins County: “It was a community that worked together. If you needed some help, you got it.” Even in a pseudo-community, such as J. Tom Padgett’s 2,000-acre Coleman County cotton plantation, tenants—when and where they could—doggedly continued the communitarian practice of cooperative labor.²⁰

One of the most important days in the yeomanry’s struggle for independent subsistence was the quintessentially cooperative “hog-killing day.” Turning shared necessity into a social rite, cooperative hog butchering supplied people’s most basic physical need while also satisfying their desire for one another’s company. At the first sign of cool weather, often one hog would be eaten fresh by participating neighbor families.

Then, around the first frost, the hog-killing main event took place. The nature of the work necessitated cooperation: moving, hoisting, and butchering three- and four-hundred-pound hog carcasses. Men and boys worked together in a celebratory atmosphere that the interviewees and others recalled with delight. In Mack Hume's community "neighbors always got together for hog killing." In East Caney hog-killing day precipitated a community-wide event, not just the two or three families described by many informants. Recalled Tom Washington, "Somebody way across would hear they was killing hogs. Why, you know, they'd have wagons running late, and ever'body'd be heatin' water, and they'd clean hogs." Children got hog bladder balloons; women visited as they prepared the day's meal; and men enjoyed the camaraderie of working together. Neighbors also cooperated during wheat threshing, syrup-making, and other times, seizing upon the practical necessity presented by large tasks to create opportunities to savor each other's company. In the midst of hard physical labor the keenly appreciated presence of neighbors created a festive atmosphere.²¹

Cooperation in work carried over into other areas of these people's community life, most notably in caring for one another during times of sickness. Young Mack Hume recalled that when his foster father fell ill that "neighbors would come and help on the farm. If a man had a crop started and got sick, neighbors did everything on the farm." Tom Washington's parents regularly "set up with the sick." Ocie Moxley also recalled the neighborliness of her north Hunt County community in this regard. Neighbors "very often . . . helped out when someone was sick." Julia McWhirter recalled that "mama was a great hand at visiting the old and the sick." Elizabeth Delk Roy recalled that her parents, Hunt County farmer-owners, were "good to visit the sick. There was a lot of sickness . . . and they showed the young mothers how to cool down the fever when their children was running a high temperature."²²

Here, as elsewhere, the division of labor by gender applied. Women usually nursed the sick or attended to household work; men worked crops and cared for livestock. In East Caney a neighbor's illness sent men out into the ailing farmer's fields "so as not to put anybody behind." In St. Luke, another Hopkins County black community, when a neighbor became sick Clifton Peoples remembered that "we'd go to that family and we'd care for them and we'd visit them and help them. Did what we could." Neighbors pitched in to "raise his crop, raise it if he wasn't able to work no more. We'd just take care of his crop. . . . Clean it out for him. If he wasn't no better, we'd gather it for him." In Peoples's

opinion community residents were simply fulfilling their function as neighbors “in sorrow, sickness, or death,” expressing, in his choice of words, the permanence of community bonds. Lula Branom recalled that in her community “neighbors helped each other. Felt it their duty. If anybody got sick, you had all the help you needed. If you couldn’t pay for your medicine, they all chipped in and paid for them.”²³ According to Hume, “people’d get in hard shape and people’d take up donations for them. They were all neighbors.”²⁴ Elizabeth Delk Roy remembered her parents sending for the doctor for sick neighbors and “stand[ing] good for his pay whenever he came.”²⁵

Neighborliness extended to the issue of trust as well. Mack Hume’s father “had a little money” and occasionally made loans to neighbors “with no note, knowing he would be paid. Their word was their note.” Jess Loftin (b. 1898), the son of a Socialist tenant farmer, recalled the trust commonplace in his community: “If you needed money, somebody would loan it to you without a note. He’d take your word for it.” William T. Davis explained that tenants did not like written contracts with landlords, because such instruments made them feel that they had been deemed untrustworthy. Written contracts taught young people to be dishonest, Davis opined. If an agreement could not be consummated with a handshake, then the two parties obviously could not trust each other.²⁶

With trust came a willingness to share. Those with productive gardens commonly made their surpluses available to neighbors or kin, who reciprocated in due course. Clifton Peoples’s family grew bountiful gardens into which they invited others to gather at will, including those from households experiencing illness or financial trouble. According to Peoples neighbors made sure “didn’t nobody go hungry.”²⁷

Nevertheless, several factors clearly limited plain folk cohesion and egalitarianism. First and foremost was white supremacy. Also, there existed geographical mobility and heightened class conflict that grew from the rise of tenancy. Individual cleavages resulted from personal, financial, or familial conflicts. When such disagreements occurred, this culture did not generally use the courts to resolve differences but instead relied upon personal, informal, sometimes violent, means of settling disputes. A contemporary critic believed such rural conflicts evidenced an “excessive individualism” hindering “all forms of cooperative endeavor.”²⁸ In fact, some of these “destructive quarrels” resulted from class conflict, as shall be seen later.

Personal feuding shrinks to insignificance compared to the other

systemic divisions in the rural community, chief among them the near-ubiquitous white belief in, and practice of, white supremacy. At least on the surface the two communities, African American and white, co-existed within the prescribed parameters of white dominance. But, while turn-of-the-century whites intended to keep blacks in "their place," blacks manifested equal determination to build that place into a habitable, triumphant community and to resist that dominance as much as they deemed prudent. By the second decade of the twentieth century black Texans had developed a closely knit world centered on family connections, churches, and schools.²⁹

In many respects, the rural poor majority shared common bonds of belief and attitude that crossed racial lines, the product of three centuries of cultural exchange. In the everyday practice of living on the land, black and white farm families faced virtually the same challenges and met those challenges in much the same ways, ways neither exclusively European nor African but with roots in both original cultures as well as in contributions from this continent. In the way in which they made their livings, in their recreation, diet, religious and moral codes, and in many other patterns of life, the rural black and white yeomanry shared at least as many common traits as they exhibited differences. The foremost historian of the Texas black experience describes turn-of-the-century rural black life as one of hard work, hunting and fishing, dances, church functions, and long revivals, practices clearly shared with their white counterparts.³⁰ As historian Jimmie L. Franklin observes of two black rural Alabama families, so could it be said of the black plain folk generally that "they were also the product of many of the agrarian values" that shaped country whites. "An appreciation for the land, hard work, and a belief in an orthodox Christian faith composed central features" of their lives.³¹ Other students of the South have arrived at similar conclusions about how rural southerners, black and white, in C. Vann Woodward's phrase, "molded a common culture."³²

In spite of obvious cultural and economic commonalities, the white majority—rich and poor, owner and tenant—adhered to white supremacy. White supremacy's roots among southern white poor people lay deep in the colonial past, and historian Edmund Morgan and others have commented on the formative role of white elites in fostering this for their own purposes. On the other hand, historian David Roediger and others have written perceptively of the role played by poor and working class whites themselves in the maintenance of white privilege. In either case, by 1910 in Texas, most of the white poor majority readily

embraced, cultivated, and enforced a racial system that added a “psychological wage” for their “whiteness.” That such a “wage” doled out by another dominant class of whites was often economically nonexistent or pitifully small and, in fact, blinded recipients to avenues of interracial cooperative resistance to their own exploitation is richly, if tragically, ironic.³³

As noted previously, in 1870 a third of the residents of the eighty-three easternmost Texas counties were black. By 1910, due to the influx of whites, blacks’ share of the region’s population shrank to one quarter. In Hunt County the black population declined from 10.5 percent to 9.5 percent during the same period.³⁴ Between 1870 and 1910 black farmers fell from 7.4 percent to 5.2 percent of Hunt’s farmers.³⁵ In spite of this, the rate at which black farmers owned their own farms increased from nearly 12 percent in 1870 to fully 22 percent in 1910.

This reflects the historic trend in landownership among American blacks. In fact, 1910 proved to be the peak year for black rural landownership in the United States from antebellum times to 1978.³⁶ Possessing the soil, the means of production, appeared prominently in Booker T. Washington’s self-help program, which became “an ideological imperative” for southern blacks.³⁷

African Americans in the Hunt County area certainly reflected the conventional wisdom of southern black leadership regarding education and economic endeavor as a means of raising their status. In 1890 twenty-nine-year-old black South Carolina native Robert L. Smith founded the Farmers’ Home Improvement Society (FHIS), serving black farmers in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. A follower of Booker T. Washington, Smith called on black farmers to diversify their crops and avoid credit purchases. Within two decades the FHIS provided life and health insurance to twenty-one thousand member farmers. By 1912 the organization also owned twenty-five thousand acres of land and used its position to seek practical improvements in the lives of rural blacks. Ultimately, Smith hoped to stamp out tenancy among blacks by helping black farmers finance land purchases and by preaching the benefits of home production and cash buying. A female auxiliary taught the finer points of the butter-and-egg economy to black farm women. Additionally, the FHIS sponsored an Agricultural College near Wolfe City, at the Hunt-Fannin county line, which turned out skilled farmers able to practice diversified agriculture. And in 1911 the FHIS established the Farmers’ Bank in Waco.³⁸ In many respects Smith’s message was similar to white southern farm reformers from the period, except that Smith’s

message was aimed at the most economically oppressed group of farmers in an era when all classes and both races of farmers found themselves disadvantaged. And, like white agrarian reformers, Smith's best efforts could assist only a fraction of those he aimed to help.

Robert L. Smith's endeavors extended to politics as well. He was the last black state representative for three generations. During Reconstruction and through the 1890s there had been forty-six state legislative positions filled by Texas blacks in both the Texas House of Representatives and in the State Senate. Smith's white majority constituency in Colorado County included many former Unionist German immigrants with little love for the Democratic Party. By the time Smith entered the Texas House in 1895, both the Democrats and the "lily white" faction of the Republican Party were working to eliminate African Americans from the Texas polity. A state poll tax designed to eliminate blacks from the political process was defeated twice during the 1870s by a coalition of black Republicans and agrarian Democrats. After the great Populist scare of the 1890s, however, Democrats enacted disfranchisement in 1903. In *Black Texans*, Alwyn Barr asserts that by the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, "the white [Democratic] primary, the poll tax, and the 'lily white' thrust in the Republican party" had reduced black voting in Texas by 95 percent.³⁹

In spite of constant hardships imposed by the general agricultural depression in the late-nineteenth-century South and the violent white supremacy of their neighbors, black Texans sought to advance their lot by following the conventional wisdom of self-help, hard work, and education. As elsewhere, Hunt County blacks idealized economic independence and educational advancement. Also typical of the region, Hunt County blacks sometimes found it most feasible and safe to seek these ideals in "freedom colonies." The "vast majority" of black farmers, however, lived in communities with both blacks and whites present.⁴⁰

Shortly after emancipation a group of Hunt County freedmen settled the Center Point community seeking independence, landownership, and security. Among them was Andrew Jackson Hurdle. Born a slave in North Carolina in 1845, Hurdle's master sold him away from his mother and father at an early age to settlers headed for Marion County, Texas. Upon emancipation, the newly freed twenty-year-old got married and moved to Franklin County for a while, then moved two more counties farther west to Hunt. In 1875 Hurdle began buying land in the Center Point community, along with other members of the growing black community. There they established a Christian Church and the Center

Point School. A community builder, Hurdle served as preacher and led the struggle to provide educational opportunity as a member of the Center Point School Board. In fact, Hurdle and other Hunt County African Americans led in the founding of Northeast Texas Christian Theological and Industrial College in Anderson County. The college prominently featured agricultural instruction.⁴¹

Neylandville was the most well-known African American settlement in Hunt County. Former slaves James and Belinda Brigham founded this community sometime in the 1850s. As a slave, James Brigham, later known as "Free Jim," worked on the side for wages with which he purchased his, his wife Belinda's, and their youngest child's freedom. Brigham and his wife were in the process of buying the freedom of their older children when emancipation came. Brigham bought 250 acres of land at \$1.50 per acre. Shortly after emancipation another freedman, Porter Laws, moved into the community, and together both men "issued blanket invitations" to freed families to settle in Neylandville. Over time, others moved into the community and bought land, and by the turn of the century this community represented the greatest concentration of black landownership in Hunt County.⁴²

Neylandville established strong community institutions, including St. Paul's Orphanage and School to solve the problem of freed children without parents. Brigham and Laws took in plantation waifs and cared for them until they turned sixteen years of age; in exchange for their care and education children worked on Neylandville farms. When they turned sixteen the community encouraged them to stay, settle, and raise their families in Neylandville. As the generation of emancipated orphans came of age, St. Paul's continued as a school for Hunt County's black children. At one time it offered the only high school courses available to Hunt County's black youth. The community grew as well, warranting a stop on the St. Louis and Southwestern Railroad, which arrived in 1886, and by 1900 had a cotton gin and a number of other businesses and fraternal lodges.⁴³

This close-knit community manifested some of the same cultural characteristics associated with yeomen communities in general. One was its status as a "kinfolk community"; as the years went by, Neylandville developed an elaborate cousin network like those of East Caney and Reilly Springs in Hopkins County. Another characteristic was the strict, if informal, enforcement of a set of community standards. "Silence," or shunning, was a formidable negative sanction against those who violated the community's code of conduct. Neylandville residents recalled the

story of Porter Laws's coat. According to one account, Laws hung his coat on a tree limb while finishing up the season's plowing and forgot to take it when he went home. The next spring the coat, with twenty dollars in its pocket, still hung where he had left it at a time when twenty dollars represented a month's pay.⁴⁴

In spite of cultural similarities, white supremacy crippled any potential alliance between black and white country-dwelling Texans. Racism was all-pervasive. Not every member of the white plain folk community subscribed to the tenets of white supremacy, but those who did not remained mostly silent. Typical early-twentieth-century white racism in the rural South tended toward the derisively congenial as long as whites believed blacks accepted the inferior position assigned them. Many whites professed a tender regard for individual black persons. Underlying these professions, however, was the nearly ubiquitous belief in the entire race's inferiority vis-a-vis white people. The oral interviewees and other sources offer an informative, complex, and candid look into race relations from the rural white perspective.

Immediately noticeable in the oral interviews was the difference between white men and white women, due to prevailing standards of both sexual and racial etiquette. Many white women were reluctant to talk about blacks and asserted little or no contact with them. This reflects the depth to which the issue of sex entwined with that of color. White men interacted with blacks at will; however, for white women such interactions represented one of the many social boundaries restricting female activities. By custom white women could associate with blacks (usually other women) only in the strictly delineated role of employer. Some of the white female interviewees went to some length to distance themselves from any knowledge of blacks. Some claimed ignorance of where blacks lived, and one asserted of her general area that "We were fortunate. We didn't have any." One ironic consequence of both racism and sexism may have been to heighten racial fears among white women due to the sexual taboos to which their culture subjected them. The presence of white women complicated white and black men's relationships. According to Alwyn Barr, black men gravitated toward work on Texas ranches and cattle drives in part because there "they faced less prejudice in such a predominately male" setting.⁴⁵

Young white girls were taught to fear and avoid black men and boys. One daughter of white Hunt County owners recalled that when she and her sisters or girlfriends would see her community's lone black hired man walking down the road that they would shout at each other, "Get

in the house! Get in the house!” One daughter of white tenants gave particularly candid answers to questions about race. “I never had seen but two black people until we moved [to Hunt County].” As a young girl she regularly saw a black wood-hauler pass in a wagon. Whenever he could be seen approaching “we run and got in the house and shut the door.” Asked if someone had directly told the girls to run away, she replied, “Oh, no. We just knew to be scared. No. And he was a harmless old nigger. . . . We made up a little song about him. And, we wasn’t, well, we wasn’t *really* scared of him. And I don’t know why we did that.” Another white Hunt County tenant’s daughter recalled that “we were just as afraid of Negroes as we could be; if we saw one coming we got in the house.” She was more certain about the source of her anxiety. This fear was based upon stories she had been told as a girl. Another interviewee’s grandmother’s terrifying bedtime stories of black men hiding under beds perfectly illustrate the manner in which adults transmitted racial fears to children. “She’d tell those stories to us when we’s little that would just scare us to death. . . . She’d tell us stories like that before bedtime and that was so scary.” This particular interviewee did not believe the events in the story had actually happened to her grandmother but were “passed down” just as her grandmother passed them down in turn.

Another compelling characteristic of the white female informant’s comments on the matter of race was the variety of attitudes and experiences that they evinced. Some, like Blanch Gray, simply asserted that the two races “didn’t mix in.” Even when blacks and whites were together, as much separation as possible was maintained. Gray described her white Reilly Springs congregation attending a black church’s baptismal service in the adjacent black community of Sandfield. The whites sat on one side of the church; the host blacks occupied the other. Afterward, the two groups shared (in a manner of speaking) a Sunday dinner on the church grounds. Here, too, they were separate; signs on the tables directed whites and blacks to the separate food and seating. Blacks were not invited to attend such services at the Reilly Springs church. Ironically, Gray’s father, who enjoyed drinking and gambling, associated with like-minded Sandfield black men regularly. She recalled one of her father’s black Sandfield friends bringing her habitually drunken father home from a Sandfield picnic “to keep him from getting in trouble.” Such care was not taken when he drank to excess among fellow whites in the county seat where he was occasionally robbed.⁴⁶

Two white farm women and one raised in town recalled black child-

hood playmates.⁴⁷ Usually such associations ended with adulthood or were transformed into employer-employee relations. Another interviewee, daughter of Hunt County owners, recalled that normally blacks only came "from East Texas" once a year to pick cotton, with the exception of a family employed by her father. "We had the only ones year 'round. Daddy built a house for the colored help. Sister taught the black girls and their mother did our laundry in exchange for it."

Some rural whites taught their children empathy with and consideration toward blacks. One white female interviewee recalled that her tenant farmer father sympathized with his African American neighbors. "Papa felt sorry for them. He didn't think they had a chance. We didn't give them a chance." Similarly, the son of a white Socialist tenant farmer from Rains County expressed sympathy for the conditions faced by early-twentieth-century Texas blacks: "A black was mistreated." In his community, blacks were not "allowed across Garrett's Creek after sundown. People were brought up to hate them." Hyatt Cheek's tenant farmer father employed blacks occasionally as cotton pickers and "got along well" with them unlike some whites, Cheek volunteered, who "took advantage."⁴⁸

White male informants usually proved more willing to talk about the issue of race than their female counterparts. They also reported a variety of attitudes toward blacks, ranging from a sort of paternalistic protectiveness, as above, to derision and disrespect. Mack Hume, son of Hopkins County owners, reported that in his community of Needmore whites protected the "colony" of blacks who lived nearby. Hume asserted that if a white outsider made accusations against Needmore blacks, local whites would retort, "Now, why you wantin' to go tell that lie?" Hume further insisted that local blacks were "absolutely respected. They went to church in the white folks' church house on Sunday nights. I knowed some of 'em when I's a kid. I knew some of 'em by name." Joe D. Wallace characterized a black family that lived within three-quarters of a mile of the Wallace home place as "just farm people like we was." He recalled that as a young tenant farmer, he and his family attended the Juneteenth celebration in southeast Hunt County near Lone Oak. According to Wallace, the only whites present at this celebration of black emancipation were tenants. The barbecue's host, black landlord Manuel Maloney, was "pretty wealthy" and had influence in both the white and black communities; he frequently assisted fellow black farmers in getting credit with local bankers.⁴⁹

Charles A. McCasland remembered no black farmers in southwest

Hunt County. Very few even picked cotton in the Union Valley community. "Blacks knew they weren't wanted around and they didn't come around. Hardly any blacks lived in Quinlan." Speaking of his Socialist father's racial precepts, McCasland stated, "Papa preferred to be with white people but thought everybody had a right to make a living. He wouldn't offend a black fellow, but he did think whites were more refined."⁵⁰

Direct questions concerning the topic of race garnered a variety of responses. One son of Hopkins County white owners believed that whites and blacks "got along just fine."⁵¹ But another son of Hunt County owners characterized the blacks living in his community as "lazy" and "no good." The most consistent theme that prevailed among everyday white attitudes towards blacks was derision, a lack of respect reflected in the incessant infliction of indignities large and small.

Most of the black informants tended to treat questions about race with diplomacy, choosing to report their positive experiences. Tom F. Washington grew up a part of the black East Caney community in Hopkins County but recalled his family's nearest neighbors were whites who worked and lived "a turn-row away." Washington's parents owned a sandyland farm but rented a nearby cotton farm. Both families worked on the thirds and fourths for the same white landlord and treated each other as neighbors but not friends. He characterized them laconically as "nice folks." Asked directly if they were friends, he hesitated briefly and replied, "In other words, we'd chop cotton for them and if we got behind they'd chop for us, you know, at a reasonable price. Or we may swap, you know." Asked about negative racial incidents around his community, Washington demurred. Instead, he related the story of an interracial baseball game hosted by East Caney. During the course of the game, in which "we was getting the best of them, I guess," Washington recalled how hostile remarks from a young white spectator were rebuked by white adults present.⁵²

Clifton Peoples came of age in the Hopkins County community of St. Luke, named for the black Baptist church. Whites lived close and the white and black churches were about a mile apart. "They'd come down to our church and we'd go to theirs." Queried directly about what kind of people local whites were, Peoples replied, "They was good people. Religious type of people." According to Peoples, whites also came to St. Luke's Juneteenth celebration, "all of them that were raised there." Peoples remembered no untoward acts by local whites.⁵³

Not all turn-of-the-century African American Texans were so fortu-

nate. Young blacks could not have come of age in this time and place without a consciousness of whites' potential for violent white supremacy. Frequent if not daily reminders branded this into their awareness. Local newspapers were filled with casual racism. Blacks and their concerns were usually presented in a dismissive manner reflecting values deeply rooted in white consciousness. For example, on the night of October 16, 1908, several drunken white men from Commerce, Hunt County, attacked a black home (characterized as "a negro cabin") in "the hollow," Commerce's principal black neighborhood. *The Commerce Journal* announced the story with the headline, "Fun in the Hollow." In a typically droll manner, the writer described as harmless hijinks a night of terror in which bullets struck the bed in which a mother and her two young children lay sleeping.⁵⁴

Lying just under the surface of everyday race relations in rural Texas was blacks' certain knowledge that the white population in general regularly countenanced acts of brutal savagery committed in defense of white supremacy. African Americans' consciousness did not have to be particularly historical in this regard; riots, lynchings, and pogroms were a part of life for late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century black Texans. In post-Civil War Van Zandt County whites attacked black salt works employees and killed or drove all of them out, mutilating and displaying the bodies of the dead. Nor were such acts limited to rural people, nor did they subside after the turn of the century. In 1913 whites in Fort Worth responded to the shooting of a white police officer with an indiscriminate attack on the African American community, burning homes and businesses and wreaking thousands of dollars in damages.⁵⁵

In ritualized public displays, whites burned to death eleven young African American men in Hunt County and seven nearby counties between 1905 and 1920. An Ellis County group of whites burned Cal Davis in 1905, and that same year Hopkins County whites burned Tom Williams; a decade later another Hopkins County group repeated the process with two brothers, Joe and King Richmond. Hunt County residents burned eighteen-year-old Ted Smith to death in 1908, and a few weeks later another group of white people committed a similar act in neighboring Rockwall County. In 1910, as citizens of Belton, Bell County, burned eighteen-year-old Henry Gentry "shots from guns and pistols rang out and yell after yell went up." In 1916 a gathering of McLennan County citizens burned, mutilated, and publicly displayed the remnants of the corpse of teenager Jesse Washington, in what came to be known as the

“Waco Horror.” Three years later lynchers in Hill County chained Bragg Williams to the concrete “Safety First” post on the courthouse square and burned him to death. The following year, 1920, Lamar Countians conducted their second public burning, this time of brothers Ervin and Herman Arthur chained to the flag poles at the county fair grounds. Through no less a means than fire itself whites seared into the consciousness of blacks their determination to enforce white supremacy.⁵⁶

The story of Hunt County’s Ted Smith and Viola Delancey well illustrates the possible range of race relations in turn-of-the-century Texas. According to the oral tradition surrounding this event, eighteen-year-old Ted Smith lived with his family and worked with them as farm laborers on a white family’s farm just west of Greenville. The white family, the Delanceys, had a fifteen-year-old daughter, Viola, who was “the pride of her family.” Less bound by racial convention than their elders, the two young people acknowledged a mutual attraction and became secret lovers—secret because both knew the dire consequences for each if they were discovered. According to the black oral tradition, some within Greenville’s black community knew their secret and sternly warned young Smith to end the affair. He declined. Through some mischance or something more sinister, the young woman’s family became suspicious and pretended to leave her alone, then surreptitiously returned and caught them. The family promptly had young Smith arrested and charged with statutory rape.⁵⁷

Once the young man was in the Hunt County jail in the Greenville courthouse, spokesmen for a gathering crowd ordered Sheriff David L. Hemsell to take Smith to the Delancey home to be identified by the girl, or they would “mob him” immediately. On July 28, 1908, around eight o’clock in the morning, the sheriff took his prisoner to the Delancey farm. The *Dallas Morning News* reported that Viola Delancey stated, “That is the negro who did the deed,” whereupon Smith screamed.⁵⁸

When the sheriff’s party returned to the jail, the assembled throng took Smith away from the unresisting sheriff. They waited while Judge R. L. Porter and Eighth District Judge T. D. Montrose urged them not to carry out a lynching. The *News* account continued, “The crowd took the negro to the public square, dragging him with a rope around his neck. There they placed a cord of wood around him and poured oil on the negro and wood and set fire to the pile. As the wood burned more was hauled and piled on the blaze and it was kept going for an hour or two.” The reporter noted that the crowd was “quiet and rather orderly” and that “no guns were discharged.” A crowd from neighboring Farm-

ersville, Collin County, arrived by train but "only in time to see the charred remains burning." The fire burned all afternoon until "all of the bones were consumed, not a piece as large as a man's finger being left." While the smoke still rose from the teenager's body, an enterprising photographer made photographs of the well-dressed crowd, which he then sold as commemorative postcards. Greenville Chief of Police W. F. Norman told the *News* that "sometimes special occasions occur" and that he could not say whether or not the crowd had "acted hastily."⁵⁹

According to a local history, the Rev. W. T. Hilton, pastor of the Central Christian Church, located one block west of the lynching site, was the "one person [who] had the courage to publicly protest the mob action." Of course, that narrator's purpose was to suggest that the innocent white townspeople were somehow afraid of "the mob," as if it were an alien entity. The leaders and participants of "the mob" were present and future prominent townspeople themselves. Most whites probably followed the lead of Greenville's mayor, absentee-landlord Joseph F. Nichols: "There will be no action taken by the authorities of Greenville relative to the burning of the rapist this morning. The deed was committed by the negro and the penalty of death was administered by an orderly body of citizens from the city and country. The negro was properly identified and taken from the sheriff and the incident is closed as far as the city is concerned." Far from being punished or even ostracized for Ted Smith's murder, two of the ringleaders were rewarded with positions of public trust, ironically, as county sheriff and city fire chief. In the immediate aftermath of the lynching, according to one oral tradition, the Delanceys' daughter "cried and cried and told her parents that he [Smith] didn't do anything." Eventually, the county sheriff acknowledged that his investigation had arrived at the same conclusion. A few years after the burning of Ted Smith, Greenville's leadership again achieved lasting notoriety by embracing a city slogan, emblazoned on a sign hanging across its main thoroughfare, of "Welcome to Greenville: The Blackest Land and the Whitest People."⁶⁰

In *Black Texans*, Alwyn Barr estimates that between 300 and 500 African American Texans were lynched in the late nineteenth century. A 1941 account reported 201 racial lynchings in Texas between 1900 and 1931, although this listing missed Hunt County's burning and probably others.⁶¹ This commonplace white terrorism provided a constant reminder of white supremacy's meaning to the black community. It tore away the congenial façade of the white majority to expose the reality of white supremacy, reminding blacks of the oppressive inescapability of a

pervasive racism with which most whites were comfortable—an across-the-board disrespect for blacks as people.

Even though some whites disagreed with the atrocities committed by the lynchers, blacks could find small comfort in such passive condemnation. The white majority tolerated the stake in their midst. And, often, even when whites publicly denounced such horrors, they did so out of revulsion for the particulars of the specific crime, not the general crime, being committed. Certainly all whites were not the enemies of blacks, and some were even friends. But white people of good will were either vastly outnumbered by the apathetic or those with terrorist intent, or they themselves lacked the courage of their convictions. In either case, blacks could count on little security in the assurances of their white friends. The atrocities simply indexed, for the watchful black community, the horrifying potential of the dominant white culture. The granddaughter of one of Ted Smith's youthful friends recalled how her elders described Greenville blacks becoming even more wary of interacting with whites in the aftermath of the lynching.⁶² Any sense of community that existed between blacks and whites resulted from the tenuously negotiated relationships of individuals.

United by class and economic interest, poor whites cut themselves off from their potential economic black allies by their own racism. Furthermore, their racism handed a powerful lever to white elites, who routinely exploited the poor white majority but could expect racial solidarity from them. Class consciousness could not compete with racial consciousness. William Owens recounts a conversation with his grandmother that illustrates this fully. Owens's grandmother proudly related that she had once met the bank-and-train robber Jesse James "when he was carrying on his fight against the rich." After listening to her boast of a supposed distant blood connection to the legendary outlaw, young William admitted that at the schoolhouse "they say he was wrong." She bristled and lectured him that she would be "thankful if you'd grow up to be as good a man as Jesse James," who, after all, had helped "widows and orphans" while "banks and railroads took land and money from the poor people." There Owens's grandmother's flirtation with class consciousness ended, because the same culture that nudged her toward class consciousness also prevented her from arriving there. Later that same evening, before retiring for the night, she took extra precautions to secure the door of the cabin in which they had taken temporary shelter, remarking, "No telling who might come around here tonight. It ain't too far to nigger town."⁶³

Other than race, the widening gulf of class and the increase in geographical mobility comprised the most divisive factors weakening the bonds of the turn-of-the-century rural community. While southern farmers historically had been on the move, the annual uprootings associated with cotton tenancy were as new as majority landlessness. One East Texan recalled, with some exaggeration, a tenant family who moved so often that the father had only to back the wagon up to the house, and "all the chickens automatically crossed their legs to be tied and the cow and hound dog quietly fell in line."⁶⁴ It was not uncommon for some tenant families to move almost every year as a result of conflict with the landlord, the inability to pay off debts, or a search for a better farm. According to one contemporary study, 88 percent of all "share tenants" had resided on their present farm four years or less in 1910. Further, 45 percent had lived on their present farm one year or less, while only 4 percent had resided on their present farm for ten years or more.⁶⁵ According to Gilbert Fite, tenant mobility figured prominently in the demise of the traditional community: "Besides poverty, frequent moves by the tenant classes discouraged the development of a more rewarding social and community life." This was especially true among the most highly mobile populations, whose constant relocations "required adjustments in regard to neighbors, social life, schools, and churches."⁶⁶

Among the interviewees, children of tenants reported over five times as many moves as owners' children. Like many others, tenant child Nora Thrasher saw frequent moves in a negative light and was proud that her family had rented only a few farms. "We didn't move very often. When [Papa] got a place they like to keep him. He kept his crops good and clean."⁶⁷ Others, however, reported moves as a matter of course. The mobility patterns of three tenant families show the range of possibilities.

Robert Lee Rice's childhood demonstrates the benefits of limited geographical mobility. Beginning in 1901, his parents, J. F. and Ella Chambliss Rice, farmed as thirds and fourths tenants in Hunt County for over three decades. During that time they moved a dozen times, eventually accompanied by their eleven children. Their mobility, however, occurred only within Hunt County, most of it within a few miles of the county seat of Greenville. After 1901 the Rices moved almost every year for over a decade. The longest relocation consisted of less than twenty miles; the shortest move was only a few hundred yards. The Rice family rented from both working farmers and absentee-landlords. They spent five years, in several one- or two-year stints, renting from Mrs. Rice's father before he lost his land in 1910. The family felt cheated:

“When [Grandpa Chambliss] made payments on the farm he trusted the real estate man to give him credit for the payment. He never did ask for a receipt. Finally the payments became so large he couldn’t pay them.” That year the Rice’s total taxable property consisted of one team of mules valued at fifty dollars and a milk cow worth twenty dollars. Finally, beginning in 1915 the Rice’s settled down for fifteen years on a tenant farm northeast of Greenville.⁶⁸

This family was not a member of a submerged class. They had family ties to land ownership even if they owned none themselves. They were able to rent farms, not just on the presumed skill of J. F. Rice, but because landlords knew the Chambliss-Rice family. While by middle-class town standards they were poor, in the countryside the proud, competent, church-going Rices fell solidly in the middling ranks of the now-landless rural majority.⁶⁹ Staying in Hunt County helped ensure their family’s modicum of security. Staying within Hunt County, where people knew their extended family, preserved their community ties just as wider-ranging mobility would have severed those ties.

Mattie Coella Self George’s story illustrates the results of such a wider-ranging mobility. Like the Rice family, the Selfs eventually came to farm a Hunt County tenancy of around seventy-five to eighty acres. But because the Selfs strayed farther afield from their kin than did the Rices, they experienced less community cohesion and instances of greater economic deprivation.

Mattie Self was born in Alabama in 1892 and moved to Texas with her family as an infant. Her parents, Eli and Ella Stringfellow Self, were thirds and fourths tenants who moved frequently throughout Mattie’s childhood. Upon arrival, the Selfs farmed on the blackland in Ellis County for six years. Beginning in 1898, however, they moved every year for the next six years, including two brief stays in the Indian Territory and one year each in two North Central Texas counties, before heading west. They farmed a year near Abilene before a sandstorm wiped out almost their entire crop, so, in December 1902, Eli Self loaded his belongings and family into a covered wagon and headed east. Christmas found them at the “camp house” in Denton, where Self had sold his mules. The next year, at age sixty and without a team, he worked a Denton County farm as a half-cropper. Making enough from his sojourn there to again outfit himself with two mules, Eli Self rolled into Hunt County in 1904 and rented a farm from an absentee-landlord on the blackland north of Commerce. In 1910, at age sixty-seven, Self owned a team valued at \$150 and a milk cow worth \$20. The Selfs stayed in Hunt County

until Mattie married. "Daddy finally wound up in Oklahoma and rented up there, too; then went out to California for a while" before eventually returning to Oklahoma, where he died at age eighty.⁷⁰

The Selfs' ties to their various communities between 1892 and 1904 were certainly not strong enough to make them stay. One can only speculate about human relationships and levels of trust under such conditions. Many people probably relied on prejudices based on the family's appearance, material possessions, and church affiliation and attendance. Mattie's unsentimental recollections of frequent home sites captures the hardscrabble tenant's attitude toward the place that had been home for the past year: "When you got through with the place you was a livin,' well, you just as—even if it was November—you was just as wells t'get up and go on to wherever you was goin' because you was through there anyhow." For the years 1898 through 1904, then, the Selfs lived in a variety of intermediate communities; in fact, their niche in such communities most likely occasionally fell into the pseudo-community category, derived not from anything intrinsic in the community itself but from their specific place within it. But during his long stay near Commerce, her father became a respected member of that community. Mattie George did not know, or did not elaborate upon, what drove her parents from county to county and state to state. As an adult, she elected to stay in Hunt County after marrying a land-owning farmer.⁷¹

Levi and Beulah Steward's sojourn in North Central Texas bears little evidence of a sustaining plain folk community. In spite of Steward's reputation as "a hard-working honest man," he often found himself exploited because he was a "stranger," cut off from the protection membership in a local family might have afforded. Between 1887 and 1915 the Stewards moved twenty times. Their story details not only the geographic mobility of tenants but also the grinding economic and emotional defeats common to those trapped on the New South's mythical "agricultural ladder."⁷² The power imbalances between Steward and his landlords, and the economic exploitation his family endured, demonstrate the increasingly intense class conflict tearing at the fabric of rural Texas communities.

They were married in Arkansas in 1887 when Levi was eighteen and Beulah was fifteen. In their first year of marriage the Stewards farmed 25 acres with a \$105 mortgaged mule; their share of the cotton failed to pay their debts, so the creditor repossessed the mule. The following year they moved to a farm owned by his mother and produced a similar amount of cotton and corn as the year before. This time, however,

the newlywed teenagers made enough extra for a down payment on a nearby "railroad farm." The first year Levi cleared 3 acres of timber and built a house while renting cleared land for cotton. They produced more of the staple than ever before. All was for naught, however, because of expensive health care and low 1890 cotton prices. "I could not go on. Cotton went down, and everything got balled up, and I could not pay for it." Faced with both the doctor's charges and a mortgage payment, the twenty-one-year-old let the house, barn, and land go to the doctor. He observed laconically, "I got a doctor bill and \$15." Even then, they ended the year \$40 in debt.⁷³

Levi and Beulah Steward moved to another 30-acre farm. Determined to cut costs, they purchased only flour, coffee, and "bulk pork" at the credit merchant's store, and Levi worked at a flour mill on Saturdays for extra flour and cornmeal. Their sacrifice worked, after a fashion. After paying the landlord and credit merchant they ended that year and the next out of debt and out of money.⁷⁴

For the next decade the Stewards rented farms from his mother, her father, and one other landlord, with greatly varying results. In 1894 they ended the year \$35 in debt. In 1900, however, they cleared \$200 and promptly put \$85 down on a 90-acre (mostly uncleared) farm. The first year on their new land the Stewards managed to meet their obligations to their creditors and break even. This relative good fortune did not last, however. In 1902 sickness again struck his young family, and two of the children died. The doctor's fees, Steward recalled, "cleaned me out." After letting the farm go back to the mortgage-holder and selling the team to meet their bills, the devastated Stewards had \$37. With that money they decided to go to Texas and start over. "I thought we could better our condition."⁷⁵

They did not. In January 1903 they arrived in Lamar County, a black-land county bordering Hunt County to the north. There the Stewards worked 50 acres on the halves for a landlord whose demands seemed unreasonable to the recent arrivals: "He wanted five or six acres of corn and the balance in cotton. I thought that was pretty tough, but that is the best I could do." Steward would have preferred about half of the acreage in corn, because with plenty of corn "a man can have hogs, you know, and have some meat" and thus some independence from the credit merchant. But "he was the man, and whenever he told anything there was no argument." Steward understood his own economic situation: "I had to have the place. We was here—I was here with my family, and if I did not want it the other fellow did, you know." That year the Stewards

managed to come out even—no debt and no money. Dissatisfied with their first hard-nosed Texas landlord, however, they moved on.⁷⁶

The Stewards then rented a 45-acre farm from a local minister. The first year there they again ended the year financially even. The second year promised better returns; the family produced eleven bales of cotton and four hundred bushels of corn. But several of the children were sick and required care from the local physician; once again, the family "came out in the hole" with a debt of \$200. Also, the reverend landlord bilked them out of a winter's backbreaking labor spent clearing land. According to Steward, the landlord promised to pay them by the acre to clear previously uncultivated woods. They managed to clear eight acres. "Me and the preacher . . . had a little round" when the preacher refused to pay. "We cleared the land, and it overflowed and didn't get cultivated and he didn't want to pay us for clearing it, because it didn't make him anything." Steward simply moved. He believed that because he had no money for a lawyer and because he was "a stranger" without "anybody to go my bond, and no friends" that "I couldn't do anything."⁷⁷

The Stewards moved on to a new farm and a new landlord near Paris, the Lamar County seat. Still working on the halves, here the Stewards came out ahead for the first time since 1900 with the tidy sum of \$200. Notwithstanding their relative good fortune, they moved away because, in Levi Steward's words, "it was down among the niggers." The next two years the Stewards rented a 100-acre farm, but, in spite of two respectable harvests, because of low cotton prices they managed only to break even both years.⁷⁸

The Stewards made some headway, however. In 1909 they rented 125 acres and bought a team and tools, moving up to "thirds and fourths" status. Here, in testimony to the growing capabilities of a large family and a larger farm, the Stewards produced forty-eight bales of cotton and one thousand bushels of corn. At the end of that year the Stewards were "even" monetarily but ahead in several other categories. The team, plows, and two wagons were now paid for, and they retained about \$400 worth of corn free and clear. Nevertheless, their good fortune did not last; the landlord sold out, and the new owners wanted possession.⁷⁹

Their next farm proved to be the site of both their productive high point and their undoing at the hands of a landlord and his credit merchant son-in-law. They rented a 120-acre farm in 1910 and stayed there until 1913. Things looked propitious at the end of 1910. They produced fifty-two bales of cotton and several hundred bushels of corn, and even after paying off the landlord their gross income was the handsome sum

of \$1,700, more than enough for a down payment on a medium-sized blackland farm. To their dismay, however, they learned that their net income was zero. The landlord's son-in-law and another local credit merchant managed to account for a combined debt of exactly \$1,700. The son-in-law told Levi Steward that the extraordinary balance due at his store resulted from the truly prodigious amounts of soft drinks, crackers, cheese, and tobacco his sons had charged throughout the year. Unfortunately, Steward kept no records of his own. "I never kept no track of it. I just thought it was allright, you know." He instructed the merchants to charge purchases made only by himself to his account, and the family outdid themselves and produced even more cotton in 1911. The results were worse than before. Still claiming purchases of drinks, cheese, and crackers consumed on credit by the Steward boys, this time the merchants' records showed them ending the year in debt. The following year, the Stewards produced eighty-seven bales of cotton, in a strenuous attempt to repay their debts and get ahead but only managed to cover their "debts" yet again. They were also moved off their farm. Their landlord had promised that if the Stewards would make certain laborious improvements, they could rent the then-improved place indefinitely. After they completed the improvements, however, the landlord informed the family that he wanted to "work it" himself and offered them another such place to improve. Steward explained his failure to try to enforce the original agreement: "He would have put me off anyway. . . . I was a poor man and the other fellow had the money."⁸⁰

Things went downhill rapidly. In 1913 rain and worms assaulted the cotton, and they made a disastrous six bales off of 99 acres. Desperately clinging to "thirds and fourths" status, Steward gave a credit merchant a lien on his teams and wagons to cover their \$750 deficit and moved to "Mulberry bottoms" for the 1914 crop year. There they made twenty-seven bales of cotton that sold for just enough to cover the cost of picking the cotton and feeding the team. They owed their new credit merchant \$600 as well as the \$750 against the team and wagons owed to the original merchant. The year 1915 found Steward desperate. By the time he testified before the Walsh Commission in March he had moved to Fannin County and already had lived at three different locations, hiring himself out for day labor, facing another eviction.⁸¹

Levi and Beulah Steward neared the end of their emotional and economic rope. They believed that they had fulfilled the conventional requirements for success on the agricultural ladder. They had worked hard and produced much cotton and corn. Beulah Steward described her life

as a teen bride: "During the spring of the year when we was making the cotton by ourselves, we would try to get out as soon as we could see how to go." She "made a hand every year," working in the fields for the first two-thirds of each pregnancy. During her twenty-eight-year marriage she believed she had been frugal. She had owned a total of three hats. She admitted, "I ordered one from Montgomery Wards. I sent them a money order for it." She had lived in houses of one, two, and three rooms, often with no screens on the windows. She had carried well water as far as a half-mile on one tenant farm. She had acquired eight pieces of furniture: four beds and a dresser, a washstand, a wardrobe, and a kitchen cabinet. She had once owned a sewing machine "until it was taken away from me." She had made all of her children's clothing except for the overalls worn by Levi and the boys. "I never have got a dress ready-made for myself in my life since I have been a married woman." Her one luxury, if it can be called that, was a supply of Dr. Miles's "Nervine" pills she kept on hand. She had had a nervous breakdown, she said, from having children at such a young age.⁸²

Geographical mobility did not cause Levi and Beulah Steward's problems, but it was certainly among their problems. Levi Steward attributed some of his victimization by unscrupulous landlords or merchants to the fact that he was a "stranger" and had no friends. Members of widely known local families could not have been dealt with so summarily. More than anything, however, frequent moves on the Steward's part represented the failure of the agricultural ladder to work. Moving from farm to farm was often indirectly, and sometimes directly, the result of their being on the losing end of one-on-one class conflict. Thus, most of the pain in the Stewards' tale resulted from power imbalances in the rural countryside wrought by the rising tide of landlessness. And that landlessness was the foundation for the other force working against cohesion within the yeoman community, class division.

Landownership dominated rural people's class structure. Within the rural community the class structure was quite simple: at the top were landowners large and small, followed by all the landless but with cash renters at the top, then thirds and fourths tenants, and true half-cropper sharecroppers at the bottom. By possessing the land, landowning farmers represented the most secure position, economically and socially. Such farmers, especially those who owned their land free of debt, experienced a practical liberty unknown to the rest. Like most turn-of-the-century rural people, their routines were guided by tradition, weather, and the cycles of nature, but within those restraints, they were the freest

people in the community, simply because their repertoire of choices was broadest. Of course, those with mortgaged land had to be mindful of the possibility of losing it and let such concerns shape labor and land-use decision-making, especially in regard to balancing subsistence against commercial production. Among tenant farmers, cash renters inhabited a status very close to landownership. Just below the cash renter in status was the thirds and fourths tenant by virtue of ownership of all of the necessities of production except land. In fact, these farmers were share-renters but did not see themselves as such. Sharecroppers working on the halves owned neither team nor implements, and many even relied upon the landlord for credit or “furnish” for the year.

When broadened to include town, at the top of the local agricultural class structure were credit merchants, bankers, and landlords. A handful of other town-based professionals also prospered in this economic setting: cotton buyers, cash merchants, local managers for the railroads, lawyers, and, as we have seen, physicians.⁸³ Many of these people were also landlords, thus more or less doubling their economic clout. There can be no doubt about this class’s economic power—at least locally—and the objective class divisions that existed between them and the plain folk.

On the other hand, in the countryside, among people who still possessed a sense of community, what role did class attitudes play in vitiating that sense of community? One distinction the interviewees seemed comfortable making was between half-croppers and thirds and fourths tenants. Mack Hume, son of a Hopkins County farmer-landlord, summed this up: “A man—most people—had a way of making it without making it on the halves.”⁸⁴ What Hume was expressing was the downwardly revised new expectation of what “a man” must do to be a respected provider for his family. In the nineteenth century, that would have included ownership of a plot of land. In the new economy, that was not to be for most people. The new dividing line, then, for respectability was “thirds and fourths” status. Hume was not commenting upon the technical details of a landlord-tenant contract but instead upholding the traditional view that “a man” could be expected to come to own a team and implements, if not land.

When asked if her Hunt County farmer father owned or “sharecropped,” Nora Thrasher replied sharply, “No! He worked on the thirds and fourths.” Thrasher had nothing negative to say of “sharecroppers” (those “working on the halves”); she just wanted to make the point that her father owned his own team and tools. There were plenty of such

sharecroppers around her family, some "as old as my daddy," and most rented from town-dwelling merchants. Landowners E. C. and Eva Lacey's daughter Lois recalled that while her parents thought of tenants only as people who "had started out with absolutely nothing," with the degree of sympathetic understanding implied, they did make the standard distinction between half-croppers and thirds and fourths tenants. "We did know the difference between people working on the halves and those who were working on the thirds and fourths." Mature farmers came to be half-croppers by "just being a poor manager."⁸⁵ Thus, rural culture adapted to the new social reality by redefining manly respectability.

Tenants had plenty of good practical reasons to strive for thirds and fourths status. The landlord no longer got half of everything the family produced; the thirds and fourths renter received less direction than the half-cropper; and, the thirds and fourths renter actually owned his portion of the crop with the right to market it. The thirds and fourth renter clearly inhabited a higher social status than did the half-cropper. This latter point helps to explain the bitter reaction from tenants to the increasing tendency among blackland landlords to alter the customary share arrangements. As competition for farms increased, some landlords began demanding one-third, or even one-half, of the cotton, regardless of the tenant's ownership of a team and implements.⁸⁶

Country people's class consciousness was a complex phenomenon. The meeting of certain cultural expectations tended to outweigh membership in an objective class when deciding a person's place in the social hierarchy. But wealth was also an omnipresent influence in such matters. Observe the ambiguity in Dorothy Mills Howard's treatment of related subjects in her memoir of growing up in the Sabine River bottom, 1902–10: "People who did not bathe every Saturday and change to clean underwear and outer clothes, who did not require children to wash their bare feet before going to bed, and all people who did not wash face and hands before each meal and comb their hair once a day or more, were classified as 'trashy.' Respectable shaven men shaved once a week or more. Respectable mustached men trimmed and pointed the mustaches and shaved once a week or more. Bearded men who lived in the woods along the river were looked down upon as trash."⁸⁷ Clearly, some among the plain folk made social distinctions. While it is not clear that economic class was the first criterion, it must have played some part. But her observations on her tenant neighbors show that a number of factors came into play in determining a family's status.

Young Dorothy's family embodied yeoman respectability. Her father owned an average-sized farm, and the family practiced a successful semi-subsistence, semi-commercial agriculture. By middle-class town standards they lived a spartan existence with few material possessions, but they were, in fact, members of the secure rural middle class: regular church-goers, literate parents (her father a bit more educated than most), a resident grandmother to transmit the family lore. On the other hand, Howard describes her family's tenant neighbors, the Driggers, as just on the other side of respectability. The father openly consumed alcohol, engaged in loud outdoor arguments with his wife, and allowed his sons to use the "swear word . . . durn."⁸⁸ Would landowners have been held to such a standard? Perhaps. Julia Horn McWhirter, a Hunt County landowner's daughter, remembered that a landowning neighbor's children were not deemed fit playmates because their father drank and allowed them to play baseball on Sunday.⁸⁹ It is entirely probable that members of a culture that so highly prized landownership would tend, in the absence of other compelling motivations (such as kinship or long acquaintance), to find reasons to look down upon the landless. Nevertheless, the rural-dwellers among the interviewees asserted otherwise with remarkable consistency.⁹⁰

Class distinctions, while existing in the countryside, were most pronounced between town and country. Townspeople made the greatest social distinctions between landed and landless farmers because of their remove from the rural community and their objectivity in seeing farmers in the clearest economic terms. A contemporary observer, Prof. William Leonard of the University of Texas, found that there existed "the asserted tendency . . . to discriminate socially between landowner and tenant."⁹¹

Only a few of the tenant children interviewees articulated any pain associated with their family's status. Hyatt Cheek recalled the issue of class differences by saying, "When I was a kid, I guess I had a complex." Of landlords he said simply, "Some were pretty hard-nosed." Cheek observed of landlord attitudes toward tenants that landlords "*thought* there was a difference" between the two classes.⁹²

Early twentieth century Greenville resident Zach Ryan recalled the awareness among town folk of farmers' tenure status and a tendency to discriminate accordingly. Townspeople "measure[d] a man's worth in acres." This form of class distinction manifested itself among school-children who, according to one tenant's son, "could not only sense class distinctions, they could measure them."⁹³

Like the schoolchildren, many adult town-dwellers, especially absentee-landlords, minced few words in their measure of the rural poor. One such landlord was former Greenville lawyer M. M. Brooks, the son of a slave-holding Mississippi planter turned postwar textile entrepreneur. Brooks attended the University of Virginia before coming to Hunt County to practice law. After practicing law in Greenville for a number of years he won election in 1898 to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, where he served until 1910. Thereafter he practiced law in Dallas, became an influential conservative Democrat, and eventually carried the conservatives' banner in the 1914 gubernatorial primary. Along the way he and his two brothers amassed 5,000 acres of "high grade" blackland cotton farms in Kaufman County, one county south of Hunt. He personally rented only "on the halves," although some of his tenants had worked his land for over twenty years.⁹⁴

"Every fool that follows the plow," Brooks intoned, "is not a farmer." He directed his tenants in every matter: when to plow, what to plant, when to plant, when to cultivate, when to harvest. Brooks advanced the argument that farming was a serious business successfully carried out only by businessmen. "There are no more farmers, my dear friends, in this country . . . in proportion to the population, than there are merchants in town. . . . [The tenant] is just an agricultural clerk. And I have a good many of them, just surely ministerial agents, agricultural clerks . . . [who] could not manage 100 acres of land by himself, if he got it, no more than he could manage the destiny of the universe. But unfortunately the impression gets abroad that the people in the country that are working the land are all farmers. Any fool can not manage a farm." Completing his rhetorical reshaping of the family farm into a capitalist cotton factory, Brooks compared farming to the mercantile business. It would be "idiotic" to go into Dallas's Sanger Brothers clothing store and say, "What a great number of merchants here." Similarly, in the case of the "Brooks Brothers'" 5,000 acres of Kaufman County farms there were really only three farmers: M. M. Brooks and his two brothers. Of the resident seventy-five tenant families, Brooks declared that not "a man" among them possessed the capacity for independent farming.⁹⁵

Thus, tenant dreams of landownership were without merit, according to Brooks. Not only were tenants incapable of successfully managing a farm, they were also incapable of managing their personal finances. As a class tenants were "nomadic," had too many children (here he contradicted himself by admitting a large family was a requirement of landlords; in any case he was simply wrong about the relative size of

tenant families), were improvident (except for those tenants who prospered so dramatically that they had “money in the bank” and made loans to their needy landlords), and foolishly sought a lifestyle inappropriate for their station in life. One of his tenants had recently purchased an automobile. “Now, that epitomizes, to a large extent, the lack of frugality of these people. They wear Stetson hats and fine shoes and just as good clothes as you and I.”⁹⁶

Explaining the sudden rise in incompetence among the plain folk proved no obstacle to Brooks. “The tenantry is increasing because they are putting in more land.” Brooks then describes how honest, hard-working small farmers like himself arrived at absentee-landlord status. They increased their holdings by increments of 50 acres here and there through “the struggle to save and buy more land.” “They would live frugally and by practicing rigid economy would save enough to buy another 50 acres. And after a while they would put up a little house and rent a part of the land to a tenant and then later they would rent more of the land to other tenants, and in that way the tenantry has increased. The tenant was not able to buy a farm, and it is one of the most beneficial things that can be done him to rent to him, and how idiotic it is to talk about charity.” In spite of Brooks’s apparent objection to charity, that very motive had guided his acquisition of so much land. In fact, “the reason I have secured these farms,” Brooks testified to the Walsh Commission, was that “I have always had a desire to help the poor.”⁹⁷

Brooks was not alone in his contempt for the rural poor. The 1915 president of the Texas Bankers’ Association declared that tenants had only themselves to blame for their poverty. He argued that they should save more money. Many of the town-based merchants, bankers, and absentee-landlords interviewed by Walton Peteet’s Texas A&M researchers found a remarkable candor in expressing their contempt for the rural poor. A Tyler, Smith County, credit merchant boasted of his ability to control his rural customers. Debt-free farmers were too independent; farmers over whom he held a crop-lien could trade only with him. He then recounted how his firm manipulated a local farmer who had made a good crop and had paid off his debts into buying an expensive buggy on credit to regain the crop-lien. The merchant told his interviewer, “This incident illustrates the lack of business sense of all negro and many white farmers in East Texas.” While not all credit merchants and town-based professionals expressed contempt for tenants, many had to arrive at such rationales to continue their exploitation. One credit merchant professed to fear tenants as a class because of their dangerously

unstable, violence-prone, "socialistic" tendencies. In fact, his desire to be a farmer himself was held back by this fear: "I cannot afford to take my family into a neighborhood composed almost entirely of renters and it is almost impossible to find any other kind."⁹⁸

The merchants of Rains County, which bordered Hunt County to the south, held low opinions of their rural customers. An Emory credit merchant told his interviewers that farmers—owners and tenants—were "indolent, thriftless, and ignorant" people whom he dealt with "just as we do with children." Furthermore, the merchant complained, access to bank credit inflated the farmer's ego, so that he "walks around and acts as if he were independent. He will come in here and walk around with a lordy air of independence which I recognize at once." Another merchant characterized farmers as "lazy and unreliable."⁹⁹

Town-dwelling absentee-landlords held similarly contemptuous opinions of tenants. "Colonel" E. W. Kirkpatrick of McKinney, Collin County, testified before the Walsh Commission as spokesman for the Texas Industrial Congress on conditions among tenant farmers. According to Kirkpatrick, the prosperous and contented tenant class did not buy land (in spite of their wealth), because "all they wanted to do was to rent for a year or two years at the most . . . and then move to another neighborhood where they could get a new chance to learn new tricks." For such happy nomads land ownership "would be equal to putting them in jail." Like Brooks, Kirkpatrick soon contradicted himself; the hard-working tenant soon became a landowner, while only the lazy "switch about and swap about and live here or there until they get in debt so they can not stay any longer and then they move and live yonder a while." A lawyer-landlord observed of his county that "renters are moving in rapidly and few of them are any good." A large ("several thousand acres") Brazos River bottom McLennan County landlord believed "white tenants" to be "ignorant and lazy." Another Brazos bottom absentee-landlord opined that "white tenants are a worthless, lazy, lying, anarchistic lot." This Waco resident had had enough of such rabble: "I have kicked every one of them off my farm except one and replaced them with negro laborers, whom I can boss and who will do as I tell them. My experience with white tenants was disastrous. They will lie, steal and cannot be depended on to take care of property entrusted to them. I do not know what is to become of the country as long as this class continues to increase, for they are socialists at heart—every one of them." While such vitriol may have been unusual, the contempt was not. No less an expert than Texas governor James E. Ferguson, a town-dwelling landlord him-

self, commented that it was commonplace for absentee-landlords who did not share the daily life of the rural community to develop mercenary, exploitative, and contemptuous attitudes toward their tenants.¹⁰⁰

The Walsh Commission's final report asserted that Texas landlords habitually "oppressed" their tenants. "This oppression takes the form of dictation of character and amount of crops, eviction without due notice, and discrimination because of personal and political convictions." The Walsh Commission's field investigator, Charles W. Holman, found in 1914 that the tendency was toward ever more control in the hands of the landlord. The tenant had become in fact a wage worker without any of the advantages of that status and with all of the disadvantages (risks) associated with farming. The older tenancy arrangements had consisted of the landlord as shareholder, according to Holman, with the tenant otherwise managing his own affairs. As absentee-landlord's cash needs rose, by 1914 landlords were increasingly playing the role described by M. M. Brooks.¹⁰¹

Landlords demanded more land in cotton than farmers normally would have planted had they been landholders. Sixty percent of tenants queried in Walton Peteet's 1914 survey asserted that their landlords made them plant more of their farms in cotton than they wished. One McLennan County tenant described how his town-dwelling landlord demanded specialization in cotton: "Landlord discouraged planting feed crops, saying he lived in town and did not need them and could buy what he needed cheaper; also, that corn was an uncertain crop and [I] had better stick to cotton." Tenant farmer J. R. Goodgame of Hamlin, Fisher County, observed that the "renter is not his own free agent to plant and raise what he pleases." Mattie George observed of her father's Hunt County landlord that he told them what to do and how much to plant. "You could plant [only] so much sorghum for your [feed and syrup]." ¹⁰²

In dictating production decisions, creditors too became *de facto* landlords. Peteet's interviewers found evidence in Smith County, near Tyler, of credit merchants dictating farm production for debtors, both owners and tenants. Apparently race was a crucial element. One black farm owner reported, "This year (1915) they told us to plant more corn but within [the] last few weeks their riders have demanded that we plow up corn and replant with cotton." His neighbor, a black tenant, confirmed that "they are now making negro customers plow up corn and plant cotton." Further mistreatment by credit merchants as *de facto* landlords centered on the price paid for their debtors' cotton. Accord-

ing to a village cotton buyer, tenants in debt to one East Texas credit merchant could not expect honest bids on their cotton; instead, other buyers made sure the credit merchant's unwritten claim to the cotton (at a greatly reduced price) would be honored. "When the buyer for a merchant puts his foot on the front wheel of a farmer's wagon, it means to other buyers 'This man owes us, don't bid.'" ¹⁰³

Not all landlords were dictatorial in their relations with their tenants. Country farmer-landlords who lived near their tenants would have a greater incentive to develop a humane, face-to-face relationship. But tenants were indeed at the mercy of individual landlord tendencies. Levi Steward's experience as a new arrival in Lamar County well illustrates the dangers faced by the tenant class. There, a landlord demanded that he put all but "5 or 6 acres" of his 50-acre place in cotton, a requirement Steward deemed "pretty tough." In fact, it was only typical of the turn-of-the-century Texas blacklands. R. W. Getzendaner, Waxahachie, Ellis County, absentee-landlord-banker, required of his tenants at least 80 percent of their land in cotton and all of the remainder in corn. In 1910, at the age of thirty, Getzendaner owned a bank and over 3,000 acres of the most productive blackland in Texas, all inherited from his father. But Getzendaner was not interested in the customary rents from his "thirds and fourths" tenants; he wanted an annual return on his land equal to the prevailing interest rate. This common goal among businessmen-landlords helped to explain, Getzendaner speculated, the increasing practice of demanding one-third shares of cotton from tenants expecting to pay one-fourth. ¹⁰⁴ The landlord "knew" what his monetary return "ought" to be (had he sold the land at its current market value, banked the proceeds, and collected his first year's interest), and if one-fourth of the cotton failed to sell for the correct amount, the only logical thing to do was to demand more of the cotton. In this way, such landlords shifted all of the risks of production to the tenant while shifting the profits to themselves.

Texas landlords unfairly evicted tenants on a regular basis, the Walsh Commission reported. Some of this took the form of political persecution, some occurred when tenants were replaced with wage laborers for purely financial motives, and some represented simple acts of piracy. Such cases reflected class conflict, although most tenants probably saw them as personal conflicts.

One Hopkins County landlord habitually evicted tenants in order to steal their share of the crop. Over the years he became known for "running off" tenants after the crop had been "laid by." He recruited outsider

families lacking the necessary community support to withstand him, then, after the tenants performed the bulk of the year's work, mounted a campaign of verbal abuse and harassment designed to dislodge the confused and frightened family before harvest. Finally, the landlord got his due when a young tenant farmer from an adjoining community rented the farm in question for the specific purpose of "whipping" the landlord. After most of the year's work had been done, the landlord's inevitable and profane attacks began. During one such encounter, however, the young man returned the landlord's taunts, inducing him to strike at him with his whip from the safe perch of his wagon seat. The landlord struck such a blow that the whip wrapped itself around the tenant where he stood in the road, whereupon the tenant grasped the whip and dragged his tormentor down from his seat and inflicted a serious beating. The tenant stayed on and picked his cotton.¹⁰⁵

Texas Congressman and soon-to-be U.S. Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson gained notoriety in 1912 with the Christmas-time eviction of tenants from his wife's recently inherited landholdings. The "progressive" Burleson then replaced the tenants with leased convict labor from the Texas state penitentiary.¹⁰⁶

Landlords also used eviction to suppress the agitation among renters by the troublesome 1910s Texas Socialist Party. Tenants complained that landlords suppressed free speech and political expression through the threat or use of eviction or of being "let go." J. R. Goodgame not only was restrained in what he could plant but in expressing his beliefs as well. According to Goodgame, the tenant "don't dare to speak up and talk his politics or his religion to his landlord for fear of having to move next year." Class-conscious militant H. O. Sydow was forced to move from his Navarro County farm because his landlord was "tired of hearing socialism talked on his place." Most anti-socialist landlords probably never had to resort to such measures, however. Levi Steward observed of Lamar County landlords that they would not rent to those tenants they suspected of being Socialists. Socialist organizer Dan C. Crider appealed to landowning comrades to rent farms to "honest, hardworking tenant farmers who are Socialists." Landlords who would "frankly" admit that anyone had the right to believe as he saw fit "are equally frank to refuse to rent land to Socialists."¹⁰⁷

Some of the most dramatic cases of political suppression and eviction concerned the 12,000-acre holdings of Dallas businessman J. Tom Padgitt. Padgitt bought 2,000 acres of cotton farms and 10,000 acres of ranch land in Coleman and Runnels counties in Central Texas. He cor-

rectly informed the Walsh Commission, "We are considered substantial people."¹⁰⁸

An agent ran the local operations, and the Padgitts rarely visited the site. Unlike most tenant-landlord contracts in early-twentieth-century Texas, Padgitt's were in writing.¹⁰⁹ He had twenty-two tenant families on the 2,000 acres. He estimated that the land yielded one-quarter bale of cotton per acre and that in 1915 his one-team, 75-acre tenants would earn a gross income of around \$750. He asserted that "it is more desirable to have a large family. There is an effort made to get them." He expected tenant children to chop and pick cotton beginning at about age eight. Tenant families lived in two-room "box houses" with a "shed behind where they cook and eat." The houses were constructed specifically for tenant occupants and had "never been used by an owner." The windows in the sixteen-by-thirteen-foot rooms were not screened, because the tenants did not want screens, Padgitt testified. Further, if he did provide screens to keep out mosquitoes and flies, "they wouldn't stay in 24 hours. They would break them out." He felt certain about this, but, he admitted, he had never actually tested his theory.¹¹⁰

Padgitt's tenants were all happy until Socialist Party agitators showed up in 1910. "They were Socialists, and they would talk to the people down under the pecan trees and on the river banks." Padgitt, who lived 288 miles away, became aware that "there were a great many Socialists in the county." Soon thereafter an Anti-Socialist League appeared with Padgitt's agent as founder-secretary and keeper of the membership lists; Padgitt testified that he had no personal knowledge of how the new organization got its start. But, serendipitously armed with good intelligence about tenant political leanings, he fired the one-third of his tenants who had failed to sign up for the local Anti-Socialist League. After that, there was "not a bit" of trouble. "They do not discuss politics anymore; that has all been cut out." If a tenant expressed incorrect views, he would be "let go." Padgitt made no distinctions between working hours and leisure hours on his place. He wanted no part of tenants who would "agitate and stir up trouble and talk at the store and keep everybody stirred up all the time."¹¹¹

Sometimes tenant complaints against town-dwelling landlords were less clear cut but no less illuminative of the time and place. Mattie George recalled with distaste the visits by her father's landlord. He never said or did anything to overtly disrespect the Selfs, but "I never liked that old man comin' out there in his buggy." On his frequent inspection trips, the landlord would drive his buggy out into the fields. "He'd get in his

buggy and ride out there across those plowed fields, those deep furrows, you know, bouncing along. I wished a lot of times that his buggy'd turn over. Never did." Her main objection is a telling one: "He just come and *looked* at things. And, you hate for somebody to be watching you." When the landlord ordered that no flowers be planted in their front yard, Mattie temporarily rebelled and planted Morning Glories. "I was fourteen and I said 'I don't care what he says, I'm going to plant some morning-glories.' They got up there and had pretty blue flowers on them and you know what happened? What do you think happened? He come up there and said, 'Take those things down! That seed'll get scattered all over the farm.'" When asked if she obeyed the landlord, George answered: "Well, yeah, you'd better." Eighty-five years after the event in question she added softly, "I hated him."¹¹²

While unusually articulate and descriptive, George was typical in the manner in which she addressed this topic. Her voice lowered as if she found the subject dangerous. Another potential interviewee, not among those cited, told a firsthand account of harsh landlord oppression and then asked not to be included in this work. Even George, when queried directly about her family's landlords, paused, then offered this highly ambiguous assessment: "They were *right*, bet your life."¹¹³

Sallie Robinson had a very specific complaint against her father's landlord. Her father, a Cass County African American tenant, worked year after year, never quite getting out of debt. Robinson was certain that her family had been systematically and habitually defrauded. Her memory of her father's travails is a powerful commentary

He said, "I'm going to sell this cotton of mine because it's going to give a good price." Said, "It's going up to ten cents." I've heard him say many a time. . . . But he'd come on back home and we'd all be a sittin' down around the fire, and he'd tell this story about it. He say, "I got ten cents a pound for my cotton today. It went up. I've got \$50.00." . . . Didn't clear nothing . . . it just cost so much to live. They'd grow good crops. The end of the year would come, and here would come the landlord, and say, "Uncle John, you done pretty good but you didn't quite get out of debt." We'd make good crops. And I was a small child. And he [the landlord] made me mad many a time. He [her father] should have got out of debt as hard as we worked.

Sallie Robinson did not forget. "I always had it in me against this man." The landlord always obligingly added her father's "debt" to the coming

year's account and agreed to extend his credit as did the local credit merchant. "If he ever got out of debt, I don't know it."¹¹⁴

Tenant resentment could become violent, as in the case of the Hopkins County tenant who thrashed his landlord. Sometimes such encounters had much more serious consequences. Green finds that "barn burnings" and "night riding erupted in over fifty counties" during an 1897 confrontation brought on by landlords raising rent. Matters worsened over time. Central Texas landlord J. T. Sneed was reportedly "one of the richest men in Texas." On March 7, 1912, one of Sneed's tenants waited outside the Georgetown Post Office, and when the landlord appeared he shot him to death, then immediately turned the gun upon himself. One Red River County merchant acknowledged that "one or two" landlords sometimes had "trouble" with tenants, although he made a significant distinction between the sandyland, with an even owner-tenant ratio and resident small farmer-landlords, and the rich river bottom lands, with a one-to-twenty-five ratio of landlords to tenants. It was in the latter setting that "trouble" occurred. In 1905 a north Hunt County tenant-landlord dispute ended in death for the landlord. The landlord, Pink Norman (age thirty, married with two children), was engaged in an unspecified dispute with his tenant G. W. Langston (age forty, married with eight children). Langston wanted to leave Norman and rent a place in the Indian Territory. Landlord Norman wrote to Langston's prospective landlord there urging him not to rent to Langston. While working together to put weather-boarding on the sides of the tenant house, Langston confronted his landlord about the letter, and soon each man was trying to hit the other with boards. The landlord hit Langston with a board and chased him into the house, struck him a second time, knocking him down, and got on top of him. Langston then stabbed Norman in the throat. They continued to struggle briefly before Norman went outside, collapsed, and died. "Both men stood well in the community," the local newspaper reported.¹¹⁵

Another even more violent incident took place a few miles north in Lamar County fifteen years later. This confrontation was shot through and through with class conflict fueled by white supremacy. A white landlord and his grown son attempted to prevent African American tenants Scott and Violet Arthur and their three daughters and two sons from moving in early July 1920, contending that the Arthurs owed them money. The Arthurs disputed the debt, and their oldest son, Herman, a World War I veteran, urged his parents not to pay. According to the tenant family, for several days the landlord and his son abused the family,

even stripping the women of their dresses and the men of their overalls at gunpoint. As might be expected, the family tried to move off the landlord's place. The Arthurs were in the midst of moving when the landlord father and son rushed into the tenant house with guns. The Arthur brothers, veteran Herman, twenty-eight, and Ervin, nineteen, shot and killed the landlords. After a three-day search the brothers were arrested and put in the Paris, Lamar County, Jail; within hours a group of men took them from the jail, chained them to the flagpole at the fairgrounds, soaked them with oil, and burned them to death.¹¹⁶

Most one-on-one class conflict did not end so horribly. When tenants felt cheated by a landlord, most reacted just as had Levi and Beulah Steward. Convinced that they were powerless to right the wrong, they moved on.

The Stewards and the tenants on J. Tom Padgitt's land were members of the pseudo-community. They lived in a rural setting that resembled a plain folk community, and doubtlessly, they even had cordial relations with their neighbors. But, because of their tenure status, because they were cut off by geographical mobility from kinship ties, the old community had already ceased to exist for them. In their new sphere of operations their primary relationship was with the landlord. Their ability to behave in any practical way like the old poor-but-independent majority was gone. When confronted with conflicts between themselves and the landowner, the only prudent thing to do was to move on. Attempted lawsuits were probably as impractical as Levi Steward believed them to be. A relatively unknown tenant with no money or family connections would most likely have found securing a lawyer's services impossible. Violence would have netted a retributive return far greater than whatever defeat they felt already. So they moved on and by their very mobility alienated themselves even more from the potential support of the yeoman community. Based on trust, custom, and prejudice, that community was sustaining and comforting only to those on the inside. Those caught on the outside, mobile tenants, blacks accused of infractions against white supremacy, knew firsthand that the plain folk community could be cold and repressive, or worse.

For many people, however, the community persisted as a sustaining force within an overall economic environment increasingly barren for poor people. It only worked, however, if they remained within kinfolk communities or intermediate communities. Of course, there was some geographic overlap, and possibly all three types of communities could have existed at the same place and the same time. Within a single geo-

graphical community, individual families might fall anywhere along the continuum the three community types represented, depending on their ownership status, kinship ties or lack thereof, and length of residence. In Texas, however, there existed something of an east-to-west trend in this matter. East Texas proper, protected by the relative poverty of its soils, featured lower tenancy rates and more long-term communities. The blackland, because of the potential wealth represented by the soil there, became the area of greatest agricultural entrepreneurial focus. Land prices and tenancy were each higher there, milk cows, sweet potatoes, and hogs were scarce, and the culture of the poor majority did not flourish.

In some respects, the richer the land the worse the conditions were for the rural poor, as in the case of the Mississippi Delta. The situation in turn-of-the-century Texas was somewhat different from Mississippi and the Southeast, however, in the preponderance of whites among the new tenant class. In any case, contemporary observers such as W. B. Yeary believed that it was no accident that Waco's absentee-landlords of the fertile Brazos River bottoms so despised their tenants and earned a reputation as grasping and oppressive. Yeary, a Farmersville farmer-landlord, contrasted tenants' circumstances in his community on the Hunt-Collin county line to the Brazos River Bottom. According to Yeary, tenants in his neighborhood were considered social equals, unlike the impersonal and aloof relationships between tenants and absentee-landlords in the Brazos bottoms. His own and other tenants were often related to landlords by blood or long association, and he did "not see any difference between the renter and the landowners" socially.¹¹⁷

Yeary indicated great sympathy with the predicament faced by tenant farmers and articulated the main theme of agrarian unrest in early-twentieth-century Texas. "We are living in a commercial age and everybody wants to make money. This has not always been the case. . . . [T]he frontier settlers . . . were content to stay on the farm with plenty to eat and wear of their own production." "We have built a monument," Yeary charged, to illiteracy, worn-out soil, unemployment, women and children in the fields "when they should be in the home and in the school," and poor white and black people "enslaved and beat out of their labor."¹¹⁸

Farmer-landlords did not have greater respect for tenants than did town-dwelling landlords out of some mystical rural bond. They were forced to admit, through daily experience, that the only thing different about themselves and their renters was their possession of the land.

Both performed the same tasks. Both endured many of the same hardships. Each was more humane to the other than in the relationships that existed between the absentee-landlord and his tenant. As Ferguson observed, the town-dwelling landlord, more apt to be possessed of many acres and tenants, lived a cash-draining lifestyle that demanded ever greater shares of the tenants' output. As the landlord saw that his ability to demand greater shares was not, in fact, restricted by law or by the scarcity of tenants, the only thing standing in his way was his own conscience. If he could make the mental adjustments necessary in degrading the tenants' role as farmer (as M. M. Brooks's comments show) or the tenants' supposed class characteristics ("lazy," "worthless," and "lying"), then increased tenant exploitation became tolerable for the landlord.

Furthermore, the increasing class conflict witnessed in early-twentieth-century Texas was not the product of a deeper cultural animosity, at least between whites. In landlord Yeary's words, the landless farmers "are just the same people the rest of us are." Local tenant-landlord conflicts were almost entirely a matter of economic class.¹¹⁹

The ever-diminishing opportunity for landownership for those raised with cultural expectations of it produced a heated public debate on the very merits of the economic system reaching its maturation among the early-twentieth-century Texas rural poor majority. Much of that debate would be couched in the moral language of the rural, yeoman church.

CHAPTER 6

"THE LAND SHALL NOT BE SOLD FOREVER"

Land and God in 1910s Texas

Late in 1910 two Hunt County preachers treated newspaper readers to an intense debate of "the land question" in Texas. Southern Baptist minister Brother J. R. Barrett presented a biblical defense of individual rights to "absolute ownership" of land and warned against "perverters" of Scripture who preached that the Bible limited such rights. The next issue of the *Commerce Journal* signaled the arrival of scriptural combat with a reply from the Rev. Morgan A. Smith, former pastor of the Commerce Methodist Church. According to Smith, preachers who failed to denounce the "theft of the earth from the people" as the "colossal crime of the ages" were "contemptible ecclesiastical lickspitals [*sic*]."¹

The exchange crackled with preacherly invective for five weeks on the front page of this rural newspaper, reflecting the yeoman community's agitation over "the land question" in Texas. Evangelical Protestantism made up the single most important social institution within the rural community, and the church embodied some of the most cohesive—and divisive—forces within plain folk culture. Even with important divisions, it would be hard to overestimate the importance of these rural congregations to the everyday life of the community. Little wonder, then, that the most important political and economic questions should be expressed within a framework supplied by the culture's religious tradition, especially a debate over land ownership. No other issue cut so

quickly to the core of the economic, moral, and cultural underpinnings of the yeoman community.

Texas Socialists drove this debate. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the Texas Socialist Party focus on land, because the rural poor majority defined ownership of land as their single most critical issue. Socialist leaders and ordinary people left an impressive record elucidating their culture's sometimes paradoxical, but always morally expressed, attitude toward land ownership.

The looming questions of alcohol prohibition and race complicated the political picture for these rural moralists. Some of the most highly respected Socialist leadership, as well as a good many of the rank and file, supported the legislative elimination of strong drink on the same moral grounds they supported socialism. On the other hand, most prohibition leaders, virtually all of Texas's conventional denominational leadership, firmly supported capitalism and the emerging business ethic and just as firmly opposed the Socialist Party. Racism further complicated the picture for potential moral radicals. Among the white majority, rural, poor, or otherwise, white supremacy rivaled for centrality belief in any single tenet of Christianity. Racially egalitarian Socialists walked a very fine line: better publicly to doubt the Virgin Birth than to question white supremacy.

The moral argument over ownership of land found expression in the language of the rural church, because the religious culture of the rural majority fostered the commonplace practice of making rigid moral judgments about all aspects of social behavior. By the second decade of the twentieth century, many rural Texans had seen just enough of the maturing national marketplace to know they did not like it. A significant minority delivered the most fundamental critique of capitalism yet seen with thousands of rural votes for the Socialist Party of America. This reaction resulted from the high value the rural majority placed on the obligations of neighbors, the centrality of work, and land ownership. By 1910, however, most of the members of this culture no longer owned their own land, and their culture failed to prepare them for the resulting loss of control over their lives. Furthermore, while many within the emerging economy prospered, as a group they grew poorer over time. The rural poor majority knew that their labor produced great wealth for the region. They could measure this in the increasingly comfortable standard of living of town-dwelling bankers, merchants, physicians, attorneys, and landlords, who made their money, directly or indirectly, from cotton. Inheritors of a culture whose precepts found articulation in

evangelical Protestantism, the rural poor majority denied that economic behavior lay outside the realm of moral judgment.

The yeoman community itself, richly paradoxical with both cohesion and division, provided the context for such moral judgments. These people practiced a matter-of-fact communitarianism in which they saw each other as kinfolk, neighbors, and co-religionists, instead of as only economic competitors. But even as some teetered on the brink of class consciousness, most yeomen remained ambivalent about class differentiation. Racial differentiation, on the other hand, was a given. More than any other feature of their culture, racism prevented the rural majority from embracing class consciousness. By the early twentieth century, southern color consciousness was too strong and class consciousness had been too taboo for too many centuries. Notwithstanding these powerful cultural barriers, the surprising Socialist showing in the elections of 1912 and 1914 in rural Texas shows the extent of yeoman discontent with the results—if not the ideology—of capitalism in the countryside. Yet, it is likely that voting for socialism represented no sudden rejection of tradition but sprang from the persistent values of the rural community itself.

The church often defined the rural community and embodied its strengths and weaknesses. In fact, "religious ideology" sometimes explained the existence of a specific community in the first place. According to one researcher, preachers sometimes led congregations of kinfolk and fellow believers into Texas from earlier-settled regions of the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. Distance as much as other factors often determined which country church a family might attend. Likewise, distance or other barriers such as creeks ultimately defined the boundaries of individual communities. Such factors both guided and limited consciousness of community.² This, ultimately, must be seen as evidence of both cohesion and division. Such a narrow focus helped to cement further the individual bonds of community within the local setting. Not knowing or caring about people across the county line also shows the limits of and divisions within the greater yeoman community or subculture. The church stood as apt metaphor for these paradoxical tendencies.

The church played a central role in the life of the usually homogeneous rural community. All of the farm oral interviewees indicated that their families attended church at least some of the time, and most attended regularly. Three-quarters of the farm subjects were either Baptist or Methodist. The remainder worshipped in Disciples of Christ,

Church of Christ, Holiness, or Presbyterian congregations. Thus, the interview subjects accurately reflected the early-twentieth-century South in general and Texas in particular. According to the Census Bureau's 1906 report on religious affiliation, 80 percent of Hunt County church members were either Methodist or Baptist. Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ, Presbyterians, and other Protestant sects accounted for the remainder, except for the slightly less than 1 percent who were Catholic. There were a few Jews, but none reported an affiliation with a synagogue in Hunt County. The 1906 Census reported about 1 percent of Hunt County's religious affiliates belonged to Protestant churches categorized as "Other." This included the residents of the village of Peniel, a Holiness community near Greenville founded by dissident Methodists in the 1890s.³ Thirty-one percent of Hunt County's entire population belonged to some religious body. This figure reflects an even higher level of church affiliation when attending non-members such as children are considered. The vast majority, members or not, professed some level of affiliation with one of a handful of Protestant denominations.

The high degree of uniformity in religion reflected both a cultural homogeneity and moral consensus. Little debate existed on the everyday standards of behavior. Those unfortunates caught straying beyond the bounds of accepted practice could count upon ostracism from the church and, ultimately, the larger community. A reputation thus besmirched often proved virtually irredeemable within that locale. Of course, a few hardy souls cared little for the approval of others, and if such persons happened to be economically independent, negative community sanction counted for little. In spite of moral consensus, a few disputed areas existed. Drinking alcohol fell into this category. Sharp division existed on this issue. As denominations, the Baptists, Churches of Christ, and Holiness churches were uniformly dogmatic on this point, Methodists and Presbyterians less so. In reality, in the countryside most congregations proved equally rigid in their public condemnation of alcohol. Individual adherents from all religious groups probably met this issue in their own way. Ambivalence and great hypocrisy characterized this culture's attitude toward intoxicating drink. Like fiddle-playing and dancing, the historic cultures from which rural Texans came had enjoyed the consumption of liquor long before conversion to pietistic sects. But there existed immense public pressures to conform to the rising tide of anti-alcohol sentiment. The debate over the legal prohibition of alcohol consumed much energy in the church as well as in the political

arena of early-twentieth-century Texas, competing with the debate over land ownership for the attention of the yeoman community.

The rural church usually strengthened community cohesiveness. In small communities Baptists and Methodists regularly shared services and even church buildings, a practice mentioned by several of the oral interviewees. This resulted from necessity. Preachers were scarce and often rode a circuit of multiple appointments. Presbyterians in the north Hunt County community of Fairlie saw their minister only once a month. Scarce buildings also prompted a form of ecumenism with denominations sharing a single building, as with the Union Valley schoolhouse in southwest Hunt County, which alternated Sundays between the groups. This prompted some respondents to list more than one affiliation. Carl Starrett's family considered themselves primarily Methodist but also attended their community's Baptist and Presbyterian churches. Many pointed out that their mother and father belonged to different churches, usually Baptist and Methodist. None reported this as disruptive. Lee Rice's Baptist parents attended the community Methodist church in one of their locations because of its proximity to their house. Merl Bledsoe Ward recalled that although the Baptists and the Methodists each had their own church building in her community, they were not deterred from sharing services. Each denomination held its own Sunday school but alternated between the two churches for the sermon.⁴

In the countryside the church also acted to vitiate class divisions and strengthen community cohesion. In the more stable communities tenants and landowners were not only often kin but also co-religionists. An early-twentieth-century examination of Texas churches noted that among rural Baptist and Methodist congregations "the membership is about evenly divided between [farm] owners and tenants."⁵ The rural interviewees overwhelmingly affirmed that both tenants and owners attended their family's churches. Lee Rice observed that in the rural Baptist and Methodist churches he grew up attending the congregation "wouldn't know one from the other" regarding tenants and owners. Only one farm owner's child reported that her Disciples of Christ congregation consisted solely of owners.⁶ Within rural congregations, as within the yeoman community itself, most people were poor and worked and lived alike. The church and its leadership reflected this. William Owens writes of a highly respected Baptist evangelist who led a revival in Owens's home community of Pinhook. When the preacher honored Owens's very poor family with a visit, as a matter of course Owens's mother

read the requested Scriptures for the illiterate minister. But when the revival culminated in a round of joyful baptisms, none of the converts, children of tenants and landowners alike, deemed it inappropriate to be baptized by their illiterate preacher.⁷

The rural church reflected both the commonalities and divisions between blacks and whites. Blacks and whites worshipped separately and to some extent differently. As others have shown, southern African Americans of this period inherited a Christianity adapted by their forbears to fulfill their unique needs and incorporate African practices. At the same time, the religious values held by rural black church-goers in Texas and the rest of the South did not differ fundamentally from the religious values held by their white neighbors: piety, an inerrantist, literal interpretation of the Scriptures, faith in a personal and accessible God, and the acceptance of the orthodox Protestant teachings regarding sin and redemption. Furthermore, even given distinctive worship styles, they still evinced commonalities in the importance of song and fervent emotion, especially among the rural Baptists, Methodists, and Holiness groups. Each race had influenced the beliefs and worship style of the other through the centuries of their pained but incessant cultural exchange. In rare acts of organized social intercourse, rural congregations of one race sometimes visited churches of the other. Hardly spontaneous, these were rather formal affairs arranged in advance, marked by their scarcity. Churches did it only rarely, and no other public institution allowed for such commingling, with the possible exception of gambling insofar as it was public. Less formal social institutions such as hunting, fishing, and community picnics or barbecues sometimes also occasioned such interracial moments.⁸

Even within the same race important divisions occurred in the rural religious community, especially with respect to economic class and theological doctrine. Class divisions played a larger role among whites than among blacks, however. According to a 1916 study, the greatest class division in rural church attendance occurred among white people. In Central Texas' Travis County, white owners were more likely to join a church than any other group; however, black owners and tenants were more likely to be church members than were white tenants. The researcher believed that the difference in the rate of participation between the two white groups grew from the "mobility and poverty of the tenant class," noting that the tenant family "usually has no permanent interest in the social life of the community."⁹

The contemporary social observer failed to see that class division cut

most deeply in the white majority, where expectations differed, disparities loomed largest, and the strongest class-based hostility existed. Many poor people did not like to go to church because they did not feel welcome and felt ashamed of their clothing. Recent economic changes made a greater variety of qualities of apparel available, and those who could afford it paid more attention to "dressing up" for church services. East Texan Dorothy Mills Howard records in beguiling detail her prosperous yeoman parents' Sunday morning outfits. Howard's father proudly attired himself in a dark three-piece wool suit with starched white cotton shirt, linen collar, tie, and gold watch-chain carefully draped across the vest. He wore the same suit to church every Sunday, the only non-work clothes he owned. Howard's mother always presented an elegant figure on Sunday. Her carefully pompadoured hair contained literally dozens of pins and nearly a half dozen decorative and supportive combs, topped with a plumed satin hat anchored by even more pins. With this she wore a cape in cool weather and a silk dress with "billowed" skirt covering several layers of garments and contraptions: a "duchess bustle," two underskirts "gored and flounced," a corset cover, a "boned waist corset," "drawers," and, finally, a "union suit" of knit underwear. Howard's parents reflected the middle-class affectations of the well-off small farmers. But even the poorest among the rural majority were clothes-conscious when it came to church. Lee Rice's recollections of church centered on the precarious business of clothing.¹⁰

Those who felt that they did not meet church standards for dress, however minimal, stayed away. One tenant farmer lamented in 1915 that "we can not go to church or Sunday school on the account of not having shoes suitable to wear."¹¹ Growing class divisions, reflecting the increasing gap between the rural poor majority and families enjoying early-twentieth-century prosperity, served to magnify the issue. As village turned into town, differences in dress became an ever more apparent badge of class in the rural church across the South. A yeoman Holiness preacher from the mill villages of the Southeast explained that until his family's move into town they had worn work clothes to church: "all we needed was a clean pair of overalls and that was enough." He discovered that different standards prevailed in town churches. This preacher opined that many poor people avoided the increasingly middle-class Methodist and Baptist churches "because of their clothes, which might not be as good as other people's." Mingling with middle-class churchgoers made country poor people feel "self-conscious about their appearance and standin'" in the community. Townspeople made fun of

country people and their churches and preachers as comically ignorant and rustic. Lamar County's *The Remonstrator* published a fictional "Socialist's Letter" that portrayed the letter-writer as an ignorant country preacher supporting "soshulism."¹²

Mainstream town churches began to assume a decidedly middle-class appearance. Decorum became the order of the day. The *Baptist Standard*, organ of Texas Baptists, lectured its readers on "church manners" and observed that "there is more rudeness, in and around, the church in the country, than in town." Likewise, by the 1920s Texas Methodist congregations became "more and more the churches of the professional man, the business leader, and the landowners." Such divisions increasingly prevailed in the town churches of Hunt County, where the different classes fellowshiped less than in the country church. Interviewees who came of age in the two principal Hunt County towns of Greenville and Commerce belonged to congregations that included no tenant farmers. George Zachary Ryan asserted that no tenant families attended the staunchly middle-class Christian Church in which he and his family worshipped. In fact, Ryan found it unlikely that any tenant family would have attended any of the Greenville churches. Of course, one reason for tenants to avoid town churches was the growing cultural divide between all rural people and residents of the rapidly growing towns. Nevertheless, a contemporary study linked falling church membership even in the countryside to increases in poverty associated with tenant farming. Researchers found a "marked decline" in white church membership "wherever there is excessive white farm tenancy."¹³

Class division worked its way into the rural church in another way as well. Some doctrinal disputes carried cultural and class baggage. The predominantly rural Churches of Christ consisted of the plain folk "non-progressive" branch of the Campbellite movement that split away from the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church). The Holiness movement manifested yet another religious element of the strain and pressure placed on the rural poor majority by economic change. Their adherence to old-fashioned standards of dress, their unabashedly moralistic judgments, and their appeal to an egalitarian ethic made the Holiness churches congenial places for poor people, functioning, according to one scholar, as a manifestation of the "crisis cults of the deprived." The two dominant denominations lost potential converts to this movement, according to I. A. Newby, because of the increasing level of education among Baptist and Methodist preachers. Their sermons came to appeal more to literate sensibilities and consequently lost power and emotion

for some among the rural poor. Middle-class Methodist and Baptist congregations sought to distance themselves from the backwoods roots of their religion by stifling the rambunctious "shouting" and emotion-filled camp meetings that had marked their advent into the southern backcountry a century earlier. They worked to ensure that now their pastors and evangelists would be literate and even trained in one of the countless new preacher schools springing up in the turn-of-the-century South. William Owens's rural, illiterate, spiritual hero would have deeply embarrassed those struggling toward what they would have called "culture." On the other hand, the most persistently rustic yeoman who continued to seek ecstatic religious worship could find it in the uninhibited emotional styles of the growing Holiness movements.¹⁴

To a certain extent, then, denominational division might work to undermine yeoman solidarity. Young Merl Bledsoe's memories of north Hunt County's ecumenical camp meetings included the observation that local members of the Church of Christ did not participate then or share services at other times of the year. The Holiness sects likewise existed beyond the pale of this standard congeniality exhibited by the rural Baptist-Methodist combine. This lack of fellowship stemmed both from the doctrinal constraints of sects who harbored doubts about others' "saved" status as well as varying degrees of derision within the mainstream rural denominations toward some of the newer sects' worship practices.¹⁵

In his well-written account of socialism in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943*, historian James R. Green has shown the role religious propaganda played in the strategy of the Texas Socialist Party. Green correctly argues that socialists chose that strategy because they understood both that the rural poor's discontent stemmed in part from their moral perspective and that they could best be reached through the use of a religion-based language with which they identified. Green observes, however, that Texas' "Bible socialism" had a more "parochial focus" and "fundamentalist tone" than the "Christian socialism propounded by urban preachers and other social gospelers." Texas socialist leaders were trying to appeal to a people "who still saw the world more in moral than political terms." Holiness and Church of Christ congregations produced a disproportionate share of socialist voters because they "just happened to be composed largely of poor people," although Green makes a distinction between what he sees as the "conservative" Church of Christ preachers and the Holiness movement, which he argues possessed

greater ideological compatibility with socialism because of its “radical asceticism and hopeful postmillennialism.” One of Green’s Texas socialist organizers observed of a recently chartered local that “holiness people make good Socialists.” Green accurately points out the “connection between economic and religious radicalism” while also seeking to minimize the influence of any religious body within the southwestern socialist movement. In doing so he underestimates the strong connection between the content of the yeoman’s traditional religious culture and their critique of the new marketplace. And, just as significant, the economic dislocations spurring political radicalism likewise produced reactions within the rural church. The pressures sparking socialist voting also helped to produce new revivalists.¹⁶

Texas socialists knew from the Populist experience to seek strong clerical support. Early in the career of the *Rebel*, the influential socialist newspaper in Hallettsville, editor Tom Hickey challenged ministers to start preaching from a verse in Leviticus, the socialists’ favorite Biblical passage on land ownership. (“Thus saith the Lord, the land shall not be sold forever, for it is mine.” Leviticus 25:23) A few months later Hickey claimed he had the names of fifty Texas preachers who had “not run like a scared wolf” when confronted with the passage. The newspaper also featured a regular column called the “Five Minute Sermon,” propounding a scriptural defense of socialism, arguing that collective ownership of property figured prominently in both Old Testament and New. In response to an orthodox socialist reader questioning this wedding of Christianity with socialist theory, Hickey defended the weekly sermon as a means of winning over the honest but ignorant Texas preacher who would be such a valuable addition to the party.¹⁷

Recruiting preachers was also simply common sense self-defense on the part of socialists. Given preachers’ immense political influence, as well as the tendency of many to denounce socialism, having at least a few clerical voices on the side of the socialists was a cultural necessity if they hoped to succeed.

Hickey’s tendency on this issue seems to have been the frontal assault. He bragged to Texas socialist activist Clara Boeer, his future wife, that “my attacks” on preachers accusing socialists of promoting free love “has raised an awful storm.” Later he announced his plans to “take the hide of a preacher” in a Bell County debate. Yet Hickey also respected the preachers in the socialist camp, especially Reddin Andrews, and learned to spend energy in his debates showing that “Socialism does not seek to destroy religion.” A correspondent tried to educate Hickey—

a cultural outsider—to the dangers of provoking church people after Hickey editorialized, under a front-page headline "The Fake of Prohibition," that the proposal to ban alcohol simply distracted working people from their economic grievances. His Texas correspondent set him straight. "Let the pro[hibition] question go. . . . We can elect a Socialist Gov. where Tex. is wet or dry. . . . But for the sake of the party don't call Pro. a fake for many Socialists do not think so."¹⁸

Religious appeals constituted a conscious decision by Hickey, who knew better than to flaunt his skepticism to readers of the *Rebel*. Even so, his apostasy bothered those in the know, including SPA organizer John E. Hardie. Hardie pled with Hickey, whom he much admired, to engage in an "investigation" of Christianity. His friend would realize the truth of the religion, Hardie believed, because Hickey was a good man whom Hardie did not want to be "surprised" when he "passed away."¹⁹

While the Socialist Party clearly promoted agitation by preachers, such agitation itself, as well as its warm reception by the rural poor, illustrates the significant role played by the people in shaping a debate in which they were deeply interested. The basic critique of the economic system emanated from the yeoman community in Texas with the Socialist Party providing only the latest vehicle to express their discontent.²⁰

Hunt County preacher Rev. Morgan A. Smith became one of the most widely known moral critics of the new economy. Smith and his wife, Sarah, moved their family to North Texas from the Indian Territory in 1893 when the thirty-six-year-old preacher worked for the Methodist North Texas Conference as a Sunday school agent. After five years they moved to Hunt County to pastor the Commerce Methodist Church. When his Commerce pastorate ended in 1900, he briefly held the pulpit of a church in Van Zandt County (a hotbed of agrarian radicalism) before returning to Commerce, where he practiced law, ran a store, farmed, and joined a local prohibition group. In 1905 he gave up his full-time Methodist ministerial credentials while retaining membership in the Commerce Methodist Church and the right to perform the functions of "a local preacher."²¹

Increasingly, Smith's sermons consisted of moral criticisms of capitalism and his call for its replacement with socialism. Of his conversion he wrote, "I had been a Socialist all my life but hadn't known it." Likewise he believed that "the common people are already Socialists, but are unconscious of it because they know nothing about it." While obviously not squeamish about a bare-knuckled theological dispute on the merits of capitalism, Smith thought the most effective method of reaching the rural

poor lay in a more melodic medium. In 1911 he published *Socialism in Song*, a collection of familiar church hymns with radical new words attacking the immorality of an economy which, in his words, “plunders you and me.” Smith hoped to “reach the Church People by showing the harmony between the principles of Socialism and genuine primitive Christianity.”²²

In over eighty songs Smith echoed the quintessential rural evangelical criticisms of capitalism. “King Mammon” had usurped the place of the laborer, the sinfully idle profited from the labor of others, and those who worked the hardest often had no home for their family. Smith addressed the woes of sharecroppers in “The End of Tenantry”:

The blessed day is near at hand,
When rich men will not own the land;
When all who toil will have a home,
And be no longer forced to roam.

Eschewing a remote posthumous justice, Smith re-wrote “The Home over There” as “The Home over Here” in which he pointedly observed:

My children are now over here,
Here my loved ones must constantly toil;
Many dear to my heart over here,
Are barred from the use of the soil.

To the melody of the camp meeting favorite “At the Cross,” Smith excoriated Democratic Party supporters:

Alas! and does the toiler vote
For hunger, rags and crime?
The party that will give him naught?
But skins him every time?

And, finally, in the collection’s most unusual number Smith paid musical tribute to the Socialist Party’s annual camp meeting at Grand Saline in Van Zandt County. In “The Grand Saline Encampment” Smith’s narrator is a reluctant convert slowly won over by the slate of rural Bible-quoting socialist speakers:

They showed how the few who have seized the land,
Are robbing the renters on every hand;
Then sang this song ‘bout the time to come,
When we’ll all quit rentin’ and have a home.²³

Eventually, Smith's efforts for the Socialist Party included lecture tours. His oratory and singing earned him a following among Texas socialists that boosted him into a place of party leadership, several nominations for state attorney general, and even a gubernatorial nomination during the party's twilight years in the 1920s.²⁴

Few of his experiences, however, could have equaled the intensity of his impassioned public debate with fellow Hunt County minister Rev. J. R. Barrett. In 1900 the Hunt Baptist Association brought in Barrett as a "missionary evangelist" to work among the rural poor in Hunt County. Especially adept at "preaching to the destitute," eventually he pastored a number of rural Baptist churches in or near Hunt County.²⁵ Barrett arrived in the area about the same time that Smith began actively campaigning for socialism. It took ten years for this competition for the hearts and minds of the rural poor majority to erupt into a public confrontation in the pages of the local newspaper.

Barrett fired off the opening round with a biblical defense of individual property rights. He contended that certain preachers sought to "pervert" a passage in the Old Testament (Leviticus 25:23), to assert that the contemporary market in land was sinful. Barrett reassured his readers that such was not the case. The apparent injunction against selling land applied only to the land of Canaan that, according to the Bible, God had given to the people of Israel. But some preachers "perverted" the passage to apply to all land everywhere. Barrett then cited numerous "land deals" to demonstrate scriptural support for the buying and selling of land. Unnamed preachers' incorrect interpretation of Leviticus arose either from ignorance or the willful desire to deceive. Barrett wanted to believe the former, but he feared the worst. "It is a dangerous thing" to misinterpret scripture even through ignorance: "But, my friends, what about a man that would do such a thing knowingly and intentionally to deceive and mislead his fellowman and cause the poor ignorant people to err . . . God pity the man that would do such a thing."²⁶

The following week Smith enthusiastically replied. He charged that Barrett sought to justify the "theft" of the people's "natural inheritance" by greedy capitalists such as his co-religionist, "Colonel" C. C. Slaughter. A favorite socialist target, this prominent Dallas Baptist philanthropist owned over 600,000 acres—enough land, Smith observed, "to furnish ten thousand Texas families a good home of sixty acres each!" Smith then argued that Barrett used scriptures out of context or engaged in shallow interpretation. He railed against concentration of land in the hands of landlords who, if unchecked, would soon hold as much power

as the “barons, earls, churls, counts, no accounts, dukes and pukes of Europe.” According to Smith, concentration of land ownership robbed “the people of their birthright,” and only “a fool or a knave” would support it.²⁷

In his reply Barrett wondered aloud about Smith’s status as a gentleman and a Christian and attacked Smith’s party affiliation by name for the first time. He felt that he had been “personally assailed” by “a Socialist pugilist” demonstrating the “true spirit of his party” in spite of socialists’ “great claims and loud cries of christianity.” Further, Barrett implied that Smith himself was a “swine” upon whom Barrett’s own Biblical “pearls” of argument would be wasted. He briefly returned to his theme of exposing the misuse of Leviticus 25:23 before rolling out the big gun of white supremacy. He asked of Smith and the Socialist Party: “What do you all purpose [sic] doing with the race question? The Negro, Albinia, same privilege along with the white working man?” This time Barrett signed himself “A Democrat to the Bottom.”²⁸

Smith’s response again featured his sarcastic wit but also more clearly elucidated primitive Christianity’s critique of the economic order. “Possession, use and occupancy is the only title to land God ever gave to anybody,” Smith wrote. The people’s collective ownership of the land came not from “buying, leasing or renting it. It is ours by right of natural inheritance.” Nearly consumed with indignation, Smith preached:

Now, turning to Ecclesiastes, fifth chapter and ninth verse, we read, “Moreover the profit of the earth is for ALL.” Is that plain enough for you? And will you still contend that the earth should be turned into private property for the benefit of a few idle loafing vagabond millionaire landlords? And do you wonder that the churches are ceasing to have genuine revivals and that the people are turning to infidelity, when you and your sort teach them that a God who has declared himself to be “no respecter of persons” has ordained a system of land laws that has already reduced a large majority of the race to tenants, serfs and slaves? And can you wonder that the people have no confidence in the religion of churches and men who evince not the slightest sympathy for the poor, oppressed and downtrodden millions of earth who have been robbed of their God-given heritage by the operation of the most vicious economic system within the power of the devil to invent? Most of the large landed estates were obtained by fraudulent methods. . . . But instead of expressing some sympathy with the exploited toil-

ing masses who have been robbed of a chance to have a home, when some one suggests that the robbers be forced to disgorge their booty, your heart becomes broken lest these plunderers of the people will not be fairly dealt with. . . . Why do you save all your tears for the robbers of the people?²⁹

Smith also demonstrated the gap between himself and most of his yeoman comrades with his insistence on collective ownership of all the land. Arguing that land "must either be privately or publicly owned," Smith reflected the orthodox socialist position before the party adopted the land compromise contained in its 1912 platform. Responding to farmer concerns, Texas socialists revised their position to protect smallholder's property rights.³⁰ Also, Smith attempted to finesse Barrett's race-baiting by accusing his opponent of trying to "side-track" their discussion of the moral basis of land ownership "by asking some irrelevant question concerning 'the negro.'" Avoiding damning honesty on the one hand and a betrayal of socialist principle on the other, Smith attempted a diversion by poking fun at Barrett's ringing declaration of partisan loyalty. Was Barrett a Senator Joe Bailey or anti-Bailey, William Jennings Bryan or anti-Bryan, gold or silver, prohibition or anti-prohibition, tariff or anti-tariff Democrat? And, most insulting of all, Smith had heard some proclaim themselves "Roosevelt Democrats" and asked "is that what kind of democrat you are?"³¹ Indulging himself in this witticism, Smith set up a resounding rebuttal that struck squarely at the heart of Texas socialists' attempt to debate economic class issues without mentioning race.

In his reply, Barrett continued to be disappointed in Smith's tone. "Now how I do wish I could keep Mr. Smith sweet." After lamenting Smith's meanness and engaging in more scriptural disputation, Barrett summed up the mainstream church's defense of private property:

A man has the right and privilege, accorded him by God, his Creator to buy and own land or any other property that he may buy, that the title is vested absolutely in the owner. . . . I want to ask the reader of this article to consider one important point. What class of preachers do you think are guilty of the spirit of theft or liars or fools? That class that today tells you and your children that it is sinful and wicked and wrong to rob or steal or lie or defraud or to be covetous or envious or jealous or dishonest? Or that class of so-called preachers that go around over the country and wherever they can get a hearing they tell the people that their preachers are guilty of upholding the world today with all of its theft and they

are liars and fools if they believe what they preach to you and your children? And furthermore, uphold [berate] the class of men that have accumulated this world's goods and speak of them as capitalists owning and controlling the world and oppressing the poor people. And you and your children ought to rise up and vote for a party that would result in creating laws that would demand these rich capitalists to give up all their lands and industries that they have paid for, teaching your children a spirit of dishonesty, cramming down them the spirit of theft and covetousness and envy? Now which class of preachers do you want your children to listen to; the class that is contending for honest and scriptural principles or the class that will and are teaching your children that it is right and honest and just to take what a rich man has from him? I think myself that Mr. Smith applies the spirit of theft to the wrong fellow and so does God's word say so.

God had ordained class structure; far from being the thieves and robbers described by Smith, "rich men" were some "of the most Godly and saintly characters in the Bible." Further, Barrett warned "the poor people" against the preacher who "raised a howl" over their plight, "not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief." But, finally, Barrett flourished his most powerful weapon of all by invoking the inextricable twining of faith, race, social conservatism, and partisan loyalty against the socialists who were roundly suspect on all four: "Mr. Smith wants to know what kind of Democrat I am. Well, I am not the kind that believes in the social equality with Mr. Negro in any shape, form or fashion."³²

Having rolled out the big gun of white supremacy, Barrett knew Smith dared not respond without exposing racially egalitarian socialism's Achilles' heel to white supremacist Texans. Barrett was right; Smith never replied. That ended the debate between Smith and Barrett but not the debate over land.

Indeed, rural Texans did debate the moral aspects of land ownership and wealth distribution during their historic transition into landlessness. The most common critiques alleged that concentration of wealth among the few impoverished the many and that capitalism rewarded greed and laziness by denying the central place of work and replacing it with money.

Among these yeoman critics of capitalism were Joshua L. Hicks and H. O. Sydow. Hicks's evolution as a polemicist mirrored the evolution of the farming community's moral criticism of the new order. Born in

1857 in Alabama, Hicks arrived in Hopkins County at eighteen, married seven years later, and spent his working life as a farmer and typesetter. He farmed in Hopkins County until 1891 and then tried farming in the Abilene vicinity. At Abilene Hicks began his career as a typesetter and worked at that occupation the rest of his life. During his stay in Abilene, Hicks began a weekly Populist newspaper, *The Farmer's Journal*. In 1911 he sold his interest in *The Farmer's Journal* to E. O. Meitzen, publisher of Hickey's *Rebel*, and moved his family to Waco, where he worked as a typesetter for a Baptist newspaper.³³

While his partisan affiliation changed several times during his questing life, the significance of Joshua Hicks lies in the fact that his principles and sympathies did not change. Hicks pursued three fundamental themes throughout his career: the evils of alcohol, the behavioral demands of Christianity, and the needs of the poor majority. The majority of Hicks's concerns focused on the needs of farmers and workers. He wrote incessantly to newspapers in behalf of his causes from 1882 until 1921, always arguing from his perspective as a Christian primitivist who identified wholly with the rural poor majority. Hicks began as a Democrat before shifting his support to the Prohibition Party. In the 1890s he adopted Populism and stubbornly clung to that party until he joined ranks with Texas socialists in 1908. Throughout he consistently called for a social order in harmony with what he saw as the values of Christianity.

Hicks came from a religious family. His mother was a Primitive ("foot washing") Baptist, and a brother pastored several rural Methodist Churches in Hunt County before coming to the Commerce Methodist Church after M. A. Smith's departure. Joshua Hicks reflected his family's religious bent. His first forays into the letters column of the local press consisted of zealous support for prohibition, a position that placed him well within the mainstream of his religious community. He was not afraid, however, to follow his convictions outside the mainstream. In the 1880s Hicks publicly challenged the racism of Texas Baptist leader Rev. J. B. Cranfill and called for cooperation between black and white prohibitionists. In 1898 he assailed the pro-war stance taken by local ministers who assisted in the recruitment of troops for the Spanish-American War.³⁴

Early on Hicks focused on the needs of farmers. Always ready to point out what he saw as the religious hypocrisy of the economic elites, Hicks offered up this pro-Granger poem in 1882:

How strange! that Congressmen should pass
Bills in behalf of every class

Except farmers; to them they cry,
"You need no help." (Root, hog, or die.)
How strange! that some who advocate
Religion in the Lone Star State
Should be so deaf to human cries
As to publish the railroads' lies.

Later Hicks supported the Farmers' Alliance, evincing a producer ideology born of his status as "a farmer, the son of a farmer" whose sympathies "are naturally with the laboring classes." He wished for farmers to free themselves from "the thralldom of debt" and to "secure the full rewards of their honest labor." Yet he also warned farmers against the potential dangers of eliminating local merchants through the adoption of the Farmers' Alliance exchange stores. Demonstrating his faith in competition, Hicks assured his readers that farmers needed "a thousand more merchants in Sulphur Springs, each having a large family to support." The twenty-nine-year-old Hicks lectured his readers against credit purchases and urged them to live frugally. Three years later a chastened Hicks wrote of farmers burdened by insurmountable debt. He wrestled with the concept of just debts, addressing the moral concerns of farmers "who have contracted honest debts and who have made all honest endeavors to meet those debts, and have failed." For Hicks, the experience "harrows the very soul," bringing humiliation and mental anguish. This time Hicks had no panacea except to enjoin creditors and debtors alike to respect each other's positions. He concluded gloomily, "I shall remedy my part of it sooner or later, in the providence of God."³⁵

Long before he called himself a socialist, Hicks vigorously fought the adoption of the fence law in Hopkins County, on the grounds that it deprived the rural poor of the common use of "the woods." Hicks argued that even though the tenant farmer might have "'no fence to keep up' . . . he has a family to 'keep up,' and it takes hog meat to keep up a family in this country." A landowner himself, nevertheless he charged that limiting the stock law ballot to property owners violated the basic tenets of democracy in favor of "landlordism." Because tenants were "just as vitally interested in the 'hog meat' question as anybody," Hicks believed that their right to vote on the matter should be enforced and appealed to his fellow farm-owners: "God forbid that my personal interest should be the only interest folded up in my ballot." The fence law failed, at least for the moment.³⁶

Later, as a socialist, he continued the theme of criticizing the social

order from the moral perspective of rural culture. With a telling turn of phrase, Hicks aimed his messages at those "who pay rent for the privilege of earth room." He argued that those who owned large tracts of farmland exacted "extortionate tribute" from tenants "who have not been winners in the game of gobbling it all up." In fact, he charged, the landlord and "useless speculator" practiced already the confiscation they accused socialists of seeking "through private monopoly of the ground that nature has spread out in plenty for all." He argued that tenant farmers' loss of individual freedom of action under "private bosses" exceeded the loss of freedom feared by anti-socialists. He raged against the injustice of "the sweat-drenched, poorly fed and poorly clothed" rural poor who must come to town and be "humiliated . . . with bared and bowed heads" by their middle-class creditors or landlords dictating to them "through bank windows, or over merchants counters. . . . The God of Justice might be expected to turn his face away from such a scene."³⁷

The changing economy and Hicks's socialist activism broadened his concerns to include urban workers. But the needs of the rural poor majority remained a constant theme. Hicks saw tenant farmers as the "largest element of the working class in Texas" and hoped for a political rebellion "by the men who work the land without owning it" against "the men who own the land without working it." Hicks believed the rural clergy ought to represent the interests of the poor majority both spiritually and temporally instead of enjoying a "cozy room" and "fried chicken" in "the home of big Brother Rentlord." He imagined a visiting preacher gazing out across the Texas landscape admiring the fields of his wealthy host being worked by families of sharecroppers. "[A] preacher who can enjoy such fare and behold such a scene and not hear a Voice from somewhere saying, 'This system is wrong and God Almighty's judgments are awaiting it,' is not worthy of Jesus, is not following after Jesus, and is really a stranger to the teachings of Jesus." Hicks's sense of outrage sprang from his cultural fundamentalism and his scorn for the religious pretensions of the progressive middle class, "so full of Christ and corn and cotton and cash."³⁸ While obviously exceptional, Joshua L. Hicks reflected elements of yeoman culture in his simply articulated faith and by his rigorous condemnation of what he saw as immoral, unneighborly economic behavior.

Southern adherents of the Holiness movement comprise a long-ignored religious group only recently given scholarly attention. The late-nineteenth-century "Holiness movement" spread among Method-

ist preachers alarmed by the “easy, indulgent, accommodating, mammonized” tendencies of mainstream Methodism. The movement arrived in Texas in the late 1870s, manifesting itself in outbreaks of camp meetings among the yeomen and doctrinal and disciplinary problems for the Methodist hierarchy. Rebel clerics formed the Texas Holiness Association in 1878, eventually leading to a number of offshoot denominations, including one founded in Hunt County. In *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States* Vinson Syman writes that “in much the same way that populist politics underwent its most convulsive phase in the South and Middle West, the holiness movement had its most turbulent experience in the same area.” In Syman’s view, however, no sympathetic relationship existed between economic radicalism and the holiness movement. Instead, he claims the movement rejected both Christian Socialism and its milder derivative, the Social Gospel. “Rather than trying to reform society, they rejected it.” He finds holiness social criticism shallow: “In the holiness system of values the greatest ‘social sins’ were not poverty, inequality, or unequal distribution of wealth, but rather the evil effects of the theater, ball games, dancing, lipstick, cigarettes, and liquor.” According to Syman, such people were mainly aroused to fight “false doctrines” such as scientific evolution and higher criticism. For him, these poor people’s congregations “represented a conservative counterweight among the lower classes” to the increasingly abstract, intellectualized, and “modernist” religion of the elites.³⁹

It would be easy to overestimate the differences between this movement and the rest of rural religious culture, however. Most southern rural Protestant denominations denounced lipstick and liquor in this era. In the 1910s, traits setting Holiness congregations apart included a radical egalitarianism (women preachers, no ornamentation on clothing), the adoption by whites of elements of African American worship style (call-and-response and ecstatic dancing), and, among the Pentecostal Holiness, the practice of ecstatic utterances (“speaking in tongues”). Seeking the truest expression of Biblical primitivism, the most radical sects rejected denominational organization and hierarchy so completely that they refused to have local pastors, relying instead on lay members of the congregation or traveling evangelists. Their lack of social criticism reflected a quietism that, among a radical minority, proscribed voting, jury duty, and military service rather than any beliefs making them the “conservative counterweight” Syman found.

The leadership of the Holiness movement had little overt connection to the socialist movement. The link existed in the motives of the rank-

and-file adherents of the two movements. Each reacted to disruption and alienation in the yeoman community occasioned by the ongoing fundamental economic transformation that saw a burgeoning middle class demanding educated preachers, decorous worship styles, and an ever-increasing share of the wealth. Both groups drew their support from among the poorest and most culturally persistent elements of a rural community in crisis.

The Holiness movement arrived in Hunt County in 1894 when a dissident Methodist cleric began holding camp meetings on his property north of Greenville, in what became known as the Holiness Camp Ground. Renamed Peniel, the eventual permanent village founded the Holiness University in 1899, and by 1910 Peniel included a Holiness orphanage, newspaper, and publishing house.⁴⁰ A clear class identity characterized these congregations. A Holiness evangelist observed of his rural converts that there were no landowners among them; instead, "all were 'poor renters.'" ⁴¹ Such movements did not just happen to be composed of poor people. Moral and economic critiques of emerging twentieth-century society found ready listeners among the rural poor majority.

Couched in the Biblical idiom rural Protestants loved, socialism could very well have appealed to those already willing to go outside the norm in search of primitive Christianity. Their rigid morality and disdain for the emerging economic ethic stemmed in part from yeoman culture itself, if somewhat intensified by their Christian primitivism. In their economics they made the socialists look positively mild. After all, a political revolution hardly compared to the everlasting punishment awaiting the "worldly" pursuit of wealth. While many were content to wait for God's justice, some clearly joined the struggle for what James R. Green calls "an apocalyptic, if not revolutionary, birth of the Cooperative Commonwealth."⁴²

Dangers sometimes awaited those so far beyond the pale. Socialist-Holiness preacher H. L. A. Holman encountered violence more than once during his years on the stump for the Socialist Party of Texas. At Galveston opponents physically removed him from the podium when he tried to preach there in 1906, and in 1914 a crowd in Trinity County beat him to death.⁴³ Before his death, however, Holman recruited another Holiness preacher to his cause.

H. O. Sydow sharecropped and preached in North Central Texas' Navarro County, just two counties south of Hunt. A Holiness tent revivalist, at first Sydow's scriptural literalism ended his preaching, because,

as a sharecropper, he found it impossible to obey the Biblical injunction to “owe no man anything.” Lamented Sydow: “I often had to face an audience in which there were people I owed and could not pay.” So, he quit preaching. Then he heard Holman preach Bible socialism and became convinced that its critique of the economic system jibed perfectly with his already radical faith. He started preaching again, but, Sydow observed sardonically, “the way I preach it now don’t suit the master class.” Like Smith, he saw landlords’ concentration of wealth in terms of sin and retribution: “Jesus denounced the system under which rent, interest, and profit is taken as robbery.” In the best rural revivalist tradition, Sydow used biblical quotations to warn the wicked: “‘Go to now you rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. . . . Behold the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.’ Tell me what it is that is kept by owners of the land; nothing but rent, and God says it is kept back by fraud.” Sydow further charged that “the rich ruling class” had rejected Christianity originally; instead, it had been “the common people” who “heard Him gladly,” because “Jesus preached an economic gospel as well as a spiritual.”⁴⁴

In spite of his apocalyptic bent Sydow believed that “we must change the system” to one of public ownership “of those industries that must be publicly used.” His thinking also reflected the rural poor people’s desire to own their own farms. Like many agrarian socialists, he saw no contradiction in the matter. After justice had been achieved, Sydow reasoned, then “everyone can ‘sit under their own vine and fig tree where none can molest nor make them afraid.’” Sydow paid dearly for his socialist ideology. Some of his Holiness fellows considered him a “backslider,” and, Sydow ruefully admitted, his own landlord, “tired of hearing socialism talked on his place,” evicted him. Sydow, the tenant farmer, once more went “out trying to find a master that would let me live on the earth.”⁴⁵

Other yeoman polemicists joined the critique of concentration of land ownership from the primitive Christian perspective. In particular, the quintessentially yeoman Church of Christ produced more than its share of dissident preachers and laymen. By and large, Church of Christ congregations epitomized the rural poor majority. Furthermore, adherents of this sect already possessed a self-identity as dissidents with distinctive beliefs and practices, the most well-known of which was their rejection of instrumental music in worship due to its absence of mention from the New Testament church. Often the butt of mainstream deri-

sion, Church of Christ adherents, like members of Holiness groups, were culturally prepared to be skeptical of conventional wisdom and to be potentially sympathetic to minority persuasions. C. T. Driskill, Church of Christ adherent from rural McLennan County, argued that all of "the children of men shall have a right to make an honest living by tilling the soil . . . without asking anybody." In his opinion, the "early Christians taught it," and the achievement of this goal "must be another prophecy in fulfillment." G. T. Walker, a Church of Christ preacher of twenty-five years, contended that it was "morally wrong for one to eat in the sweat of another's face," yet the present system encouraged "greed and graft and disregards this fundamental principle and upholds the moral transgressor who eats and fares sumptuously every day off the labor of others." Faced with such practices, "my faith rebels," Walker wrote. This aging Church of Christ minister crystallized his economic critique: "The moral law embracing all good government may be summed up in one sentence, even this: 'thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself.' But this principle under the profit, rent, and interest system has been supplanted by greed, graft, and rapine." In 1912 a Church of Christ minister worried over the number of "good brethren" who had adopted socialistic beliefs. "You would be surprised if I were to publish the names of preachers who claim that Socialism is the true religion of Jesus Christ." He objected that churches were "calling just such preachers to hold their meetings" instead of more conventional ministers.⁴⁶

In and around Hunt County, ordinary country people voiced an extraordinary critique of the economic system during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Personal recollections of plain folk socialists appeared among the nonagenarian oral interview subjects. Jess Loftin acknowledged his tenant farmer father's attachment to socialism and observed of the Rains and Hopkins County communities where he grew up: "The biggest part of the old people were Socialist." Loftin's estimate gains credibility when one considers Rains County's 30 percent Socialist Party vote in the presidential election of 1912.⁴⁷ Mack Hume (b. 1900), reared in a community on the Hopkins-Hunt County boundary, recalled an extended family of socialists who regularly stirred the ire of his father if not his mother. "There was a regular colony of Socialists . . . at Tira in Hopkins County. Joe McCuller preached socialism. So did their daddy and about four or five of the boys. . . . They used to have a little picnic at Tira. Always had a brush arbor. Argued their socialism there. They believed the government ought to own everything. Something about all the farm land would belong to the government. The old man [Hume's

father] would cuss ‘em coming and going. I asked the old lady what he did that for and she said he was afraid [that under socialism] he wouldn’t have any money to buy his liquor with.” The McCullers were not always welcomed in town. A county seat crowd shouted down “one of the McCuller boys” during an attempted speech at Sulphur Springs.⁴⁸

Hunt County’s John A. McCasland typified the ideal of the pious yeoman who regularly attended his rural Disciples of Christ church. Said his son, “I don’t see how anyone could have been more religious than Papa.” A neighbor “loved Papa so much” that he requested that McCasland, a layman, preach his funeral sermon. McCasland was also a “deeply committed Socialist” who worked hard to introduce his neighbors to this fundamental moral critique of the economy by hosting numerous itinerant socialist organizers. At the same time, he gently served notice on his more cosmopolitan SPA houseguests that he disapproved of their sometimes sacrilegious or irreverent humor.⁴⁹

W. E. Sherwood, rural Methodist from Van Zandt County, loved his church but feared it had strayed away from primitive Christianity. Sherwood believed that the Methodist church leadership ignored the needs of the rural poor majority and “is almost wholly capitalistic.” As a result, he believed that “in rural districts the Church is looked upon more and more with distrust.” The son of an itinerant Methodist preacher, Sherwood believed socialism to be “wholly in harmony with the teachings of Jesus.” Sherwood expressed pointed anger at the local pastor “who can pray for His ‘will be done on earth as it is in Heaven,’ and then by his ballot help to prevent it.” He worried about the future of the Methodist Church, then under the direction of “the fanatical reaction.”⁵⁰

A secular, nonpartisan 1915 survey of 115 farmers in twenty Texas counties supplies a verbatim encounter with a people who left few such records. Their comments prominently featured the public debate over the moral basis of land ownership. Most of these farmers complained about high interest rates and land prices and low prices for their produce, but a significant minority went even further. A third of the tenants, and a little over a fifth of the owners, engaged in fundamental criticisms of the economic system. Their most common targets were the credit system, “oppression” and “fraud” by landlords, and concentration of land ownership. One tenant believed that “the renters by their own labor” had increased land values, thus making “it impossible for themselves to buy land. Something is wrong somewhere.” But, he hastened to add, “I am a Democrat and do not believe in Socialism.” Among the critics, the two most commonly offered solutions were the abolition of the private credit

system and limits on the size of landholdings. Most would not have called themselves socialists; only a few made such declarations. The others expressed their discontent in familiar terms of moral judgment. An angry Ellis County tenant charged that landlords "are robbing and oppressing renters and farm laborers. The present owners of this land did not earn it. They got it by robbing the man who cultivated it."⁵¹

This willingness to question the moral basis of ownership demonstrated the link between the yeoman community in general and the radical minority supporting socialism. Letters written to the Socialist Party leadership reverberated with rural poor people's moral indignation against the economic system. One writer believed that "this country is rotten ripe for the new gospel." Another agonized over the plight of sharecroppers constantly moving about, searching for a home. "Why does God's people, good young working men and women, have to be put out into the lanes that were built by men for stray cattle?" Another linked religious and political radicalism among tenants but warned that such renters knew better than "to speak up and talk his politics or religion . . . for fear of having to move next year." A writer from Central Texas complained that he and his fellow tenants had "worked like slaves and paid [the landlord] this enormous sum of money to live on God's footstool—where God said the land shall not be sold forever." Perhaps the most poignant commentary linking religion and a critique of the economic order came from African American farmer Lewis Jones: "I do not know what to do. I work harder than any one man in this county, but myself and my family are still on the rocks and cannot get off. Yes, I am willing with all my strength to try to better the times if it can be done. I want righteousness and love and peace among all mankind; the good Lord will plenty [supply] the earth with love. . . . I hope to see the day when every man and woman can live under their own vine and fig tree with the love of God in their soul." Jones's reference to "their own vine and fig tree" reprised a common theme among Texas socialists. A. C. Walker, a Callahan County farmer, wrote, "Give us Socialism and the religion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Then, he believed, the "high salaried preacher that is hired to please and tickle the ears of the people will disappear and men will preach Christ and Him crucified, and they will not be afraid to preach on death, hell, and the judgment." Clearly, this was no advocate of an urbane "social gospel" but a voice from deep within rural people's religious culture.⁵²

Prohibition complicated yeoman politics. The simplest response to prohibition came from the *Rebel's* Tom Hickey, who dismissed it as a

gigantic red herring used to divert the poor majority from more serious enterprises. He also counted the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company among his most important advertisers. Therein lay part of the problem for many a rural traditionalist. An irreverent skeptic, the Irish immigrant Hickey's frequent use of biblical rhetoric most likely represented an opportunistic propaganda technique picked up from such believers as M. A. Smith and Joshua L. Hicks. Thus, Hickey was able to blithely dismiss prohibition. On the other hand, rural churchgoers tended to feel strongly about the issue, especially those community-oriented enough to vote or be interested in socialism. The same cultural and religious bent that made the socialist criticisms of the new economic order attractive also made prohibition attractive.

Further, some of those fully engaged in the moral debate over land ownership included otherwise respectably conventional prohibitionists. The two who most epitomized that sort of respectability were Rev. Reddin Andrews and Rev. John C. Granbery Jr. Reddin Andrews fulfilled the cultural archetype of the turn-of-the-century Texas religious leader with his earnest gaze, starched collar, and neatly combed hair and Van Dyke beard. In reality, however, this Baptist preacher shared few common characteristics with his generation of Texas' religious leadership. "I am a class conscious Socialist," he wrote in *The Farmers' Journal*, "bound, therefore, to vote for the interests of the class to which I belong, the useful workers of the world."⁵³

Born in La Grange, Texas, in 1848, young Andrews had served in the Confederate Army before returning to study for the Baptist ministry. He graduated from Baylor College in 1871 and also attended graduate school at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in South Carolina. Andrews pastored Baptist churches in East Texas until the mid-1880s, then served as an administrator at Baylor—briefly as president—during its move to Waco from Independence. Afterwards, Andrews pastored churches throughout the Central Texas region and edited a small Baptist newspaper. According to one biographer, Andrews's Civil War experience made him a pacifist. This did not, however, indicate a timid personality. In 1889 Andrews left Baylor during a controversial church trial of a fellow minister, whom he publicly defended against two powerful members of the Texas Baptist establishment. Five years earlier Andrews had taken a stand for "Baptist liberty" (as well as a gratuitous swipe at the upper class) before a Texas preachers' conference at Waxahachie. He lectured his fellows that Baptists historically struggled against "oligarchies and aristocracies" in favor of "human rights." Andrews argued that

Baptists "have spoken, written, and struggled in every way, recognized by Heaven as right, to oppose the crushing heels of tyrants and the ensanguined swords of despots." Later, Andrews became an outspoken Populist and even ran for Congress on that party's ticket.⁵⁴

Andrews had undeniable appeal to the rural poor majority. His Baptist, Confederate, prohibitionist, and Populist credentials represented symbols of cultural authority to potential supporters. His 1910 nomination showed a tentative first step toward cultivating the yeomen; before that the Texas party's leadership resisted "populistic" measures designed to reach out to farmers. Andrews also embodied the touchy problem of prohibition for the Texas Socialist Party. Even as Hickey, the Texas SPA's most widely read spokesman, denounced prohibition, Andrews sat on the prohibitionists' state organizing committee.⁵⁵

Andrews's piety did not soften him toward capitalism, however. Capitalism had demonstrated its futile "inefficiency." Its supporters in government did not "seek the ends of justice or regard the interests of the masses." Capitalism was a "reigning, ruling, robbing, and ruining power" based upon "private ownership of public utilities." Outdistancing many of his followers, Andrews also called for "the perfect political and industrial equality of women." For good measure, he condemned the Texas poll tax.⁵⁶

John Granbery's experiences demonstrate the extensiveness of the debate over the moral basis of land ownership in early-twentieth-century Texas. The son of a Virginia Methodist bishop, Granbery graduated from Vanderbilt University and held a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. For years a Virginia pastor, Granbery saw himself primarily as "a preacher of the gospel" with a vocation for service among rural poor people. At forty-four he yearned for "newer territory" in Texas in which to make a "larger investment of my life." In 1913 he found his niche at Southwestern University. Rev. G. C. Rankin, editor of the state Methodist newspaper, welcomed Granbery to Texas as a fellow prohibitionist. Soon such conventional prohibitionists and Granbery would permanently part ideological company, however, because of his role in the debate on the moral basis of land ownership.⁵⁷

Less than a year after his arrival in Texas, Granbery published an article detailing the role of "the land problem" in the Texas Democratic gubernatorial primary of 1914. Writing for a national audience of like-minded reformers, Granbery focused on James E. Ferguson's proposed rent control law, which claimed to protect sharecroppers from increasing exploitation. The optimistic Granbery assured his readers that the

debate on land ownership in Texas had educated the populace to the point that even “conservatives” and “individualists” endorsed “radical schemes” such as Ferguson’s proposals. He saw Texans building a consensus toward limiting absolute private ownership of land based on “considerations of social welfare.” Granbery felt that Texans especially showed a willingness to condemn land held purely for speculative purposes. The people of Texas, Granbery declared, “realize that there is a condition demanding a remedy” and “that the coexistence of the landless man and the manless land is intolerable.”⁵⁸

Granbery’s involvement indicates the extensiveness of the public debate on land ownership. While not a dogmatic socialist, Granbery obviously had been deeply influenced by socialism. At the same time, Granbery’s critique of the economic order came from his perspective as “a preacher of the gospel.” He believed that the rural church lay at the heart of the tenant farmer’s predicament. The problem of land monopolization could be answered only through “the country church and what the country church stands for and must stand for.” Rural preachers must “be thoroughly socialized” in their attitudes toward “sin” and “salvation.” “Take the land question. What does the gospel teach on that subject? I have respect for my friends who think country preachers ought to be trained in scientific agriculture. The preacher would be better off if he were. . . . But this is one thing he ought to know; he ought to know that the book, which he calls the Bible, from which he preaches, says: ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.’” But, just as the landlord denied political agitation, so, too, did the Methodist church, Granbery lamented. Making no effort to disguise the fact that his thinking on the subject remained unsettled, Granbery observed that “I know more about the direction in which I am moving than I do about the exact goal.” Some things were clear already, however: “I do not believe in any absolute property in land.” He thought society should make contracts with farmers to afford “private control” of land whose ownership had been permanently nationalized. Ironically, then, Granbery believed in collectivism more than many socialists. Granbery used his position to proselytize the Methodist clergy on “the social mission of the church,” in spite of the fact that his “work and influence” were “imperiled” by “the savage assault” of Rankin, his erstwhile friend at the *Texas Christian Advocate*. Clearly, agreement on prohibition alone failed to bridge the ideological gap on land ownership.⁵⁹

In spite of some agreement on the matter of prohibition, the “land question” and socialism divided the Texas denominational leadership.

But prohibition loomed large on the Texas political landscape. Its connection to the debate over land ownership is a simple one. Many of the rural churches' religious heroes, men who had led the fight against the evils of alcohol, also actively campaigned against socialism and defended absolute property rights. These two movements, prohibition and socialism, shared just enough common culture to be competing for the same supporters in the countryside. Both movements appealed to the traditionalist conscience, both evinced a willingness to limit individual liberty in order to achieve a greater social good, and both claimed to have the good of the poor majority at heart. As Andrews and Smith demonstrated, some socialists made good prohibitionists, but the reverse was not true for mainstream prohibitionists. The official spokesmen for the Texas religious establishment uniformly supported prohibition and denounced socialism. Writers and speakers representing Texas Methodists, Baptists, Churches of Christ, and other groups routinely attacked socialism.

Methodism had the easiest time of all of the major Texas denominations in dealing with the moral debate over land ownership. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, possessed clear lines of episcopal authority and enforced a discipline among its preachers impossible in the congregational bodies. When M. A. Smith began his career as a Socialist Party lecturer-agitator, he surrendered his preacher's credentials to the denomination. The church stripped another well-publicized socialist convert of his license to preach. Rev. G. G. Hamilton had been an anti-socialist star in the Methodist Church, regularly debating socialist agitators in an attempt to show the Methodist faithful the heresies of socialism. Socialist observers accused Hamilton of shouting "vile epithets" at their champion, and the sheriff had to restore order at one such confrontation. Eventually Hamilton ran up against lawyer Stanley J. Clark, the brilliant but erratic southwestern socialist orator, who challenged Hamilton to read Walter Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis* as a prerequisite to further debate. Hamilton read the book and announced a stunning reversal of his position on socialism. The *Rebel* gleefully reported "another brand plucked from the burning." To his former supporters' horror Hamilton (obviously a man of intense enthusiasms) immediately volunteered to go back out on the stump for socialism and invited former anti-socialist colleagues to face him in debate. The North Texas Conference of the Methodist Church referred the case to Hamilton's presiding elder "for further investigation." One year later the church removed his ministerial credentials.⁶⁰

The numerically dominant Baptists consisted of a collection of self-governing congregations. Because of congregationalism and the tradition of “Baptist liberty” regarding matters of conscience, this denomination embodied many of the paradoxes of the yeoman community in regard to matters such as “the land question” and socialism. Growing class and cultural cleavages among Baptists aptly symbolized the divisions growing within rural Texas society at large. In early-twentieth-century Texas there were Pinhook Baptists (like William Owens’s family and their illiterate evangelist), and there were First Church of Dallas Baptists (like millionaire C. C. Slaughter and his friends G. W. Truett and J. B. Cranfill). Slaughter amassed a ranching and banking fortune of over four million dollars, 600,000 acres, and a reputation as a philanthropist. Biographer David J. Murrah writes that First Baptist of Dallas pastor George W. Truett, through “appeals to [Slaughter’s] pride and vanity,” secured tens of thousands of dollars for Baptist causes. His close friend J. B. Cranfill credited Slaughter with leading “all the great [Baptist] achievements that we have known through the past quarter of a century.” Early in the century Slaughter had saved Cranfill’s *Baptist Standard* from financial trouble with the timely purchase of shares. Cranfill exulted, “We suppose that it has never happened in Christian history before that two millionaire Baptist laymen were joint proprietors of a religious and denominational paper.” Cranfill clearly articulated a growing creed within his increasingly middle-class denomination when he observed that preachers themselves should be good businessmen because of “the people to whom the modern preacher is to minister.” The good Christian businessman “knows how to make money in a righteous way” and could be trusted to support his church. In fact, wealth followed piety. The *Standard* reported that a businessman whose fortunes were falling realized that “he had not been honest financially towards God.” Immediately he corrected this error with a large donation, and “from that very day, aye, from that very hour, I saw the change, and he did gather a fortune.”⁶¹

Perhaps the *Standard* reached the height of its defense of business interests in an editorial supporting railroads. Prominent prohibitionist preacher J. B. Gambrell lamented the people’s “attitude of decided unfriendliness” toward railroad companies. For Gambrell, the injustice lay in how much the railroads had done for the people, increasing the value of their farms and spreading civilization and the gospel. Yet Gambrell reported in dismay that it “is found difficult, lawyers tell me, for railroads to get justice in the courts.” This resulted from “agitation” by “dema-

gogues" who managed to stir up within "the masses an evil disposition." Banks, too, were being mistreated, Gambrell reported. "No good comes to a people by keeping alive prejudices such as have made it difficult to develop the country." Tellingly he noted that railroad corporations "are liberal to religion . . . because morality and business are close friends." In the spring of 1912, during the height of the agitation of "the land question," the *Standard* attacked land redistribution and associated it with Mexican Gen. Francisco "Pancho" Villa, an almost archetypal bogeyman for many Anglo Texans. According to the *Standard*, the "greasers" following this "chimerical" plan failed to appreciate its dangers. A few weeks later the newspaper attacked those who attempted to use the Bible to show that "Jesus decried wealth." Quite the contrary, as shown in their own time, since the largest fortunes of the day "have fallen to religious men." After all, Christ himself had "died among poor villains" but had been "buried by rich Christians." In order for the church to win over the practical-minded businessman, it must become "sensible about things." Disciples of Christ leaders, dominated by urban, middle-class interests, likewise defended the religious basis of wealth. One DOC minister averred that "the most beautiful souls" he had ever known were "not among the poor but the rich." In fact, he doubted that Christianity could "flourish in the wretched, filthy, vermin-besieged houses of the poor."⁶²

The *Rebel* lustily pursued open combat with all of the denominational newspapers in Texas without success. The *Baptist Standard's* publishers knew that they had nothing to gain by providing Hickey with publicity. Further, most denominational papers generally eschewed open partisanship except in the cause of prohibition. In 1912 former *Standard* editor J. B. Cranfill published his preferred slate of "moral" (dry) Democrats running in that party's primary. Earlier, the *Standard* had denounced Clarence Darrow, the McNamara brothers, and "criminal anarchy" in its comments on the *Los Angeles Times* bombing case. The Socialist Party had hired the celebrated lawyer to defend the two West Coast labor activists charged with the bombing. The *Standard's* comments were not unusually inflammatory, given the atmosphere, but Hickey never missed an opportunity for heated reply. He stormed that the only thing wrong with the McNamara brothers was their alleged membership in the Democratic Party. Socialists would overlook that, however, and continue to defend their innocence against "these cowardly whining Cranfills" and his ilk, who were the "kept ladies" of capitalism, "gutter snipes of the muzzled press."⁶³

While the Baptist press chose to avoid a direct discussion of “the land question” and socialism, the Church of Christ organ responded differently. The Churches of Christ’s very congregational make-up promoted disputation. Not only did these congregations reject denominational organization and hierarchical discipline, they avoided the use of prescribed Sunday school literature or like material. Thus, their ministers regularly debated the true meaning of scripture in the pages of the *Firm Foundation*, their statewide newspaper. Furthermore, perhaps the single most accurate generalization about these people is that they sought “an end to division” (denominationalism) and a return to the primitive Christianity of the New Testament. As congregational as Baptists in matters of church governance, they had no bishops to silence dissident clerics. Finally, this group disproportionately consisted of rural people.

These three factors—congregationalism, a culture of vigorous debate, and a rural poor constituency—helped to produce a sharp reaction to “the land question” and socialism within the Churches of Christ. As has been shown, many among them came to equate the doctrines of socialism with an economic version of the primitive Christianity they sought. Certainly this large a heresy could not go unchallenged. Assisted by the *Firm Foundation*, a minister from Reddin Andrews’s hometown of Tyler took up the task of warning Church of Christ adherents of the fallacy that socialism embodied primitive Christianity. No stranger to East Texas socialists, William F. Lemmons warned of their growing numbers within the Churches of Christ. “Too many” of the “brethren” had read the *Appeal to Reason* and the *National Rip-Saw* “until they had gone crazy.” To counteract this madness, he engaged in several celebrated debates with Texas socialists, wrote an article for the *Firm Foundation*, and published a book entitled *The Evils of Socialism*. Lemmons’s article blasted socialists for trying to hide their atheistic materialism under the cloak of biblical language. According to Lemmons, socialism represented only the latest eastern vileness to beset the pristine West. British oppression of the colonies and northern oppression of the South had come from the east: “chattel slavery came from the east; child labor, girl slavery, tainted money, watered stock, greed and graft, oppression, higher criticism, socialism, and other evils are eastern relics, injected into the west to poison the nation.” Building more Church of Christ colleges would provide the only sure defense against socialism and higher criticism. In the short-term, however, reading his book, *The Evils of Socialism*, might thwart such delusions.⁶⁴

The Evils of Socialism meant to correct the error of “many good breth-

ren" who were devoting themselves to "the doctrine of this eighteenth century twaddle." Chief among the blights of socialism was its atheistic tendency. After all, the theory grew from the writings of Karl Marx and, according to Lemmons, Charles Darwin—two rank infidels. Socialism sought to supplant all religious creeds, even as its adherents falsely portrayed it as primitive Christianity. Socialism promoted free love, female equality, anarchy, and violence; failed to respect the flag and the Constitution; pushed impractical economics; and denied the God-ordained nature of private ownership and the class system. Socialism broke a number of Biblical injunctions against the "mingling" of nations, worker discontent, and contempt for temporal authorities. Finally, socialism would mean "social equality" with African Americans.⁶⁵

Lemmons focused on debating the issues of primitive Christianity, the correct moral basis for land ownership, and the causes of landlessness but concluded with a lengthy denunciation of socialism's threat to white supremacy. While socialists sought to represent their critique of capitalism as resurgent primitive Christianity, Lemmons denied the legitimacy of any such claims. In fact, socialism embraced atheism and drained away attention from the spiritual life. "Look at the many who have gone into Socialism. . . . I could cite you to [*sic*] preachers, as well as 'Lay members,' who have lost all interest in Christianity, and are giving their life's work" to spreading the heresy. In fact, the current moral critique of capitalism was nothing more than socialists "trying to make it [the Bible] apply where it has no application." In defending property rights, Lemmons used the same kind of language Texas socialists used to question private ownership: according to Lemmons, socialism meant theft. Here Lemmons carefully acknowledged that "capital" could be put to both good and evil purposes; this position represented the conventional yeoman critique of capitalists rather than capitalism. But, from the very beginning God had decreed private ownership of property. "Adam and Eve were capitalists" and doing just fine until Satan's arrival. "But the Devil was a Socialist" who persuaded Eve to expropriate fruit to which she was not entitled.⁶⁶

Lemmons made a special appeal to farmers. Private ownership represented the only claim to land that farm families could trust. He struck at the heart of agrarian socialism's contradictory goals. Socialists sought to "dupe the farmer into believing that he can own his own farm under Socialism, and many farmers have accepted the theory of this gang of destructives. They use the term 'collective' ownership in order to cover up the truth, and catch a few suckers amongst the honest farmers, who

have labored and saved up enough to own their own farm. . . . If land is 'collectively' owned, it is not privately owned, and hence the farmer is just a Government renter under Socialism." Lemmons knew that the yeomanry hated the thought of being renters on someone else's land. Fortunately, landlessness and poverty were easily avoidable since poor people chose that station in life. He cited the example of a Hunt County tenant farmer who had begun only two years earlier with less than two dollars of capital, but, through "brains and muscular power," was going to have as much as two thousand dollars saved at the close of the current season. He assured his readers that he had been "raised on a farm" himself, that "most of [my] people are farmers," and that he bore them no ill will. Rather, he was the friend to all of the "working class," which included workers, farmers, and capitalists, everyone except "the tramp." Landlessness and poverty existed because the poor did not use their wealth "judiciously." According to Lemmons, poor people's share of the \$5.8 billion spent yearly on alcohol, tobacco, entertainment, jewelry, and other "unnecessary expenses of the poor" would have provided every tenant family in the United States with a farm of their own. The Texas economy grew so fast that property values rose \$600 million a year, meaning that Texans created \$41 of new wealth every second. "With these figures before us, what is to hinder every family owning a farm?" The poor, especially "Socialist inclined people" and "negroes," simply did not want to work. "If these poor people in New York and Chicago and other cities would get out into the country and dig, as God ordained, they would not suffer. . . . If their wages do not suit them, why don't they get out and settle on a farm and raise their own hog and hominy and be independent?"⁶⁷

Neither the nature of primitive Christianity, the sanctity of private property, nor the dereliction of the poor carried as much unifying emotional impact as the topic of race, however. That is why Lemmons devoted one-eighth of the entire work to a denunciation of socialism as "a system of 'nigger' equality." Lemmons assumed that the majority of his audience, the church-going, white, rural poor majority, did not believe in racial equality. Equality with blacks, these people had been repeatedly warned, meant black domination. At the very least, political and economic equality led inevitably to "social equality" and the ultimate horror of "cross breeding." Lemmons warned that the greatest catastrophes of history, including the pollution of Christianity with "heathen" beliefs (Catholicism) and the onset of "the Dark Ages in Europe," were caused by the mixing of "pure" blooded peoples with lesser

racism. And socialism advocated this deplorable "brotherhood of man." If socialism continued to grow, the purity of the white race, and thus true religion and civilization itself, would be destroyed. The subtext of African American men as sexual rivals, as well as an apparent fear of white women if "freed to do as they please," ran throughout Lemmons's essay. In one particularly revealing section Lemmons wrote that under socialism "your daughter can [take the] arm [of] a colored gentleman to church at high noon on Sunday, or on the dark of the moon at night, because . . . it will be no stigma on society."⁶⁸

Socialists from within the Church of Christ wrote Lemmons attacking both "monopolization of land" and his opposition to the Socialist Party. One annoyed "brother" lectured Lemmons on socialism's religious character: "Better read the *National Rip-Saw* and post up." Lemmons retorted, "That is your trouble. You have read the *Rip-Saw* until you think it is the gospel of Jesus Christ." The *Rebel* printed rebuttals from nineteen of Lemmons's fellow Church of Christ ministers, defending their support of the Socialist Party. They argued that in spite of its "infidel" founders, the Socialist Party's demands represented the best chance for the fulfillment of their hopes for an economy based on primitive Christianity. They also pointed out that churchgoing Democrats seemed to have no trouble supporting "infidel" Thomas Jefferson's party.⁶⁹

Those in the Church of Christ opposed to socialism did what they could to diminish the inroads the debate on land ownership had already made into their sect. The most discerning of their radical opponents believed it counterproductive to inadvertently force country people to choose between their religion and the Socialist Party. In a 1913 debate with a Church of Christ minister, W. S. Noble, a former COC minister himself, affirmed the proposition that the "ethics of socialism are identical to the ethics of the Bible." But Noble also urged his Church of Christ "'comrades' who had quit the church to return to her protecting folds and quit arguing infidelity and other stuff that would be hurtful to the peace and happiness of their community."⁷⁰

A survey conducted by the *Rebel* in the summer of 1911 left little doubt that "the divide-up" faced formidable clerical opposition in the countryside. The *Rebel* asked its rural readers discreetly to poll their farmer neighbors to determine country people's objections to socialism. Religion figured in six of the twenty-five separate objections reported. Some of the others also fell under the classification of conventional morality, such as the concern that socialists meant to commit theft and

murder as a means of obtaining property and once in power would usher in female suffrage and racial equality. The objections centering on religion, however, revealed the belief that socialism meant infidelity, was “irreligious,” opposed the God-ordained class structure, condoned free love, and “seems to have it in for the preachers.” Weary of such charges a Hunt County socialist wrote that the common people held to their morality with great certainty, and socialism, as a form of democratic self-governance, would only strengthen whatever institutions the people believed in most.⁷¹

The writer correctly appraised the yeoman community’s certainty regarding moral values and judgments. Traditional evangelical Protestantism made up the single most important social institution within the countryside. These turn-of-the-century rural people knew what they believed, and, while disagreements might exist in doctrinal specifics, a moral consensus still prevailed across a broad social front. That consensus included the conviction that economic behavior, like other human endeavors, ought to be evaluated against a moral standard. This facet of yeoman culture helped sustain a criticism of early-twentieth-century capitalism that found expression in the socialist-driven debate on the correct moral basis of land ownership. But powerful counterforces pulled yeomen away from adherence to the socialist agenda. While many wanted a more equal distribution of wealth, the majority also cleaved to the notion of property rights in land, at least for the owner-occupant. Most were conventionally religious, and their religious leadership clearly divided over the issue of land ownership. Most powerful of all the cultural influences, white supremacy cut off most from even considering socialism. In spite of these powerful factors, a significant minority among the rural poor majority did indeed manifest an innovative willingness to adapt the meaning of their cohesive community values to a new economic reality by debating the moral basis of land ownership and, ultimately, casting ballots for the Socialist Party during the second decade of the twentieth century.

» CHAPTER 7 «

“WHOSE PLANET IS THIS ANYWAY?”

Land and the Politics of Dissent

Late in the summer of 1911 the new Texas socialist newspaper, *The Rebel*, admonished tenant farmers that “the only renter worth a whoop to his class is the rebellious renter.” The *Rebel* wanted rural poor people to see that they were worth as much as anyone who had “ever strode majestically up and down the planet Earth. Well, why not? Whose planet is this anyway?”¹

The *Rebel* was calling upon a long, if minority, tendency among rural Americans. Since colonial times small numbers of rural Americans occasionally combined to resist outside forces, including the national market, from triumphing over custom and locally centered economies. Rural dissidents usually lost.² In late-nineteenth-century Texas, controversy over fence laws, railroad regulation, money supply and Populism showed the intensity of such resistance during the 1880s and 1890s.

Plain folk control of the land recurred as a muted theme throughout late-nineteenth-century Texas protest politics. Greenbackers toyed with it, as did reform Democrats; Populists placed it squarely on their agenda and demanded the state repossess corporations’ publicly dispensed bounty. Populist defeat and imposition of the poll tax disillusioned and truncated the unruly Texas electorate, and the land issue waned on the public agenda for a decade.³

Then, perhaps after it was already too late, the Socialist Party reasserted rural demands for a wider distribution of land ownership. The

genesis of such demands came not from the national leadership of the Socialist Party; instead, this plank in the Socialists' platform grew slowly out of interaction with the plain folk themselves.⁴

The Texas Socialist Party called for the redistribution of land among the rural poor. The party's attention to "the land question" reflected the debate over the morally correct basis of land ownership then exercising the countryside and demonstrated the reach of the yeomanry's criticism of capitalism. Rural Socialists engaged in a structural critique more fundamental than either Greenbackism or Populism, both of which had sought ways to reconcile the interests of the land-owning majority to a business-dominated economy given to disastrous monetary cycles. The Socialist Party, on the other hand, rejected the capitalist structure entirely. Notably, however, it gained limited success in the countryside only after acceding to smallholders' private property rights even while calling for redistribution of "surplus" land among the tenant class.

Significantly, the period between the death of Populism and the rise of the Socialist Party also witnessed the end of land ownership as a majority experience. Reformers in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s appealed to a Texas farming class composed mostly of owners; by 1910 the reverse was true.

Like other southern states, Texas went through a politically chaotic period during and after Reconstruction. The Democratic Party eventually "redeemed" the state through a combination of violence, fraud, voter intimidation, and appeals to white supremacy. Even after their return to power, disfranchisement of black and poor white voters did not immediately follow. In fact, the 1875 state constitutional convention, including many Grangers and six African American delegates, rejected calls for a poll tax.⁵ And, in spite of the Democrats' grim determination to retain power, dissent remained commonplace throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. Agrarian protest in the 1870s and 1880s found voice in Texas through the Greenback Party's call to alleviate the crushingly unequal burden of monetary deflation on farmers. In percentage of votes, Texas was the Greenbackers' number one state in 1880 and second only to Kansas in support of the similar and short-lived Union-Labor Party in 1888. In reality, the third party dissenters of the 1880s never threatened the Democrats' hold on office. On the other hand, the Farmers' Alliance and Peoples' Party movement did challenge the Democratic Party's monopoly. During the 1890s Texans consistently voted at two or three times the national average in support of the Peoples' Party, peaking in 1896 with 44 percent of Texans voting for the Populist gu-

bernatorial nominee. The Democrats survived these challenges and in 1902 eliminated the poorest and least reliably Democratic voters with a poll tax.⁶

Thereafter, the Democratic Party enjoyed nearly a decade of stable dominance interrupted only sporadically by prohibitionist agitation. Then, in the second decade of the twentieth century, a significant minority of the Texas rural poor seized upon the Socialist Party of America (SPA) as a vehicle to critique the outcomes of the capitalist economy triumphing around them. This minority upheaval came at the very end of the rural majority's independence and embodied their most bitter condemnation of the shape of the new order.

Texas Greenbackers had protested the prevailing economic order of the late 1870s and early 1880s. The "Independent Greenback clubs" of Texas first convened in 1878 to nominate a state ticket and announce a platform. This biracial gathering asserted government's responsibility to protect the rights of all citizens regardless of race and accused both the Democrats and Republicans of fostering "a financial system so radically wrong as to pauperize the masses to support a chosen few in idleness and luxury." The heart of their agrarian platform called for currency inflation to help indebted farmers, an end to corporate subsidies via gifts of public land, state-funded public schools, a graduated income tax, and "universal manhood suffrage." The Greenbackers gathered most of their support from tenants and small farm owners, organized labor, and "nominally Republican" African American workers and tenants. Greenbackers had an immediate impact on state politics, pushing the Democrats' endorsement of inflation.⁷

Republicans welcomed any challenge to Democratic dominance. Some Republican politicians saw Greenbackism as an opportunity to appeal to a rural white electorate normally inaccessible to Republican candidates, while others, including radical Edmund J. Davis and African American labor leader Norris Wright Cuney, actually endorsed the third party's policies. In 1882 Republicans decided not to field a state ticket, and their party's chairman called on Texas Republicans to unite under a single banner with all those "opposed to the Democrats."⁸

In 1878 the Texas Greenbacker gubernatorial candidate polled almost a quarter of the vote, even with a Republican opponent. With and without Republican backing, the Greenbackers ran as the virtual second party through the mid-1880s. In 1880 Greenbacker James B. Weaver polled 12 percent of the Texas presidential vote, taking votes in equal measure from the Democrats and Republicans. In 1882 a fusion of

Greenbackers and Republicans supported Independent G. W. "Wash" Jones for governor and took 40 percent of the gubernatorial vote—about half coming from disaffected, pro-inflation Democrats. The following gubernatorial election, 1884, the Greenbacker candidate dropped to 27.1 percent while still maintaining second place against the resurgent Republicans.

Hunt County proved one of the most reliably Democratic counties during the Greenbacker heyday. Nevertheless, pockets of dissent manifested themselves as early as the gubernatorial election of 1882 when the Greenbackers received 13.3 percent in Hunt, with the strongest support coming from the rural communities of Mattox, Wade, and White Rock in the western half of the county and Bear Pen and Prairie Valley on the southern and southeastern perimeter. These five precincts returned nearly half of all Greenbacker votes, averaging 23.4 percent.⁹ All five dissenting precincts were homogeneous rural communities containing virtually no town-dwelling voters.

By 1884 the Greenbackers lost considerable ground in the gubernatorial race in Hunt County and the state. They claimed only 2.3 percent countywide against a Democratic share of 86.9 percent and Republican share of 10.7 percent. Only the voting box at Wade maintained firm minority support for the dissident party, returning 43.0 percent for the Greenbackers. Largely because of Wade, rural voters gave nearly four times the level of support for the third party as did voters in towns. This election signaled the end of the Greenback party in Texas, however.¹⁰

As the Greenbackers faded, an even stronger agrarian movement blossomed in the Texas Farmers' Alliance. Discontented Texas farmers formed the Alliance in 1877, reorganized in 1879, and introduced it to the rest of the nation in the 1880s. While officially avoiding partisan politics, Texas Alliancemen almost immediately built bridges of cooperation with Texas labor unions and increasingly encouraged a growing agrarian wing inside the state's Democratic leadership.¹¹

Reformers had no viable third party in 1886. Thus, many reformers supported the tiny Prohibitionist Party's first state ticket, which, in the absence of other reform activity, gained 6.1 percent of the vote. Attempting to broaden their appeal, Prohibitionists included promises of railroad regulation and arbitration of labor disputes. The Prohibitionists did well in Hunt County, garnering over twice their state percentage with 13.9 percent of the vote, defying historic patterns by doing best in the countryside, albeit notably in many of the formerly Greenbacker communities.¹²

In terms of the survival of the plain folk community, the politics of liquor was of little import compared to the issue settled in Hunt County's special election of 1887. That year Hunt County faced a far-reaching and fundamentally decisive election regarding the fencing of livestock. The post-Civil War southern enclosure movement went a long way toward destroying the traditional way of life of the rural poor majority. Historian Stephen Hahn and others have demonstrated the importance of the fence laws in explaining the end of independence elsewhere in the South.¹³

Losing free range for livestock forced small farm owners and tenants deeper into dependence on credit merchants and landlords. A recent arrival to East Texas observed in disgust in 1887 that "the people have been in the habit of using every man's property as their own for so many years that they have come to believe that the land has no owners."¹⁴ According to historian Thad Sitton, "rural traditionalists" did not in fact believe the woods belonged to no one. Quite the opposite: they believed, in the words of one East Texan, in the "Indian right that the land belongs to everybody." These "customary rights" extended to all manner of subsistence use of the woods but, significantly, not profit-making endeavors such as fur trapping or shingle-making. "The whole system . . . was based on cooperation and neighborliness and did not work without them."¹⁵

While the inhabitants of the great East Texas forests maintained such practices well into the twentieth century, on the high-priced blackland prairie the issue came to a head much sooner. Requirements that certain livestock, especially hogs, be confined were gradually introduced through local option "hog law" elections provided for in the 1876 Texas constitution. Hunt County held such elections over a five-year period beginning in 1882 for as small an area as seven farms. These community elections had mixed outcomes and presented an unacceptable situation to those demanding that crops everywhere be protected against free-roaming hogs. So in 1887 Hunt County held a countywide election, and the fence law carried the day, 618 to 416, passing by a two-thirds vote in towns while eking out only a bare majority in the countryside. The earlier pattern of rural dissent remained true. Bear Pen, Hackberry, Maxey Hall, Pleasant Grove, Prairie Valley, Roberts, and White Rock averaged 61.6 percent against the measure.¹⁶ The passage of this law sped Hunt County farmers toward a one-crop commercial economy.

The following year radical farmers and workers brought the land issue before the Texas polity. In 1888 the Farmers' Alliance and Knights

of Labor convened in Waco to consider “what steps, if any, should be taken in the approaching campaign.” The convention’s leadership included the ex-Greenbacker and future Socialist from Fannin County already known to his foes as “the anarchist Bill Farmer.” The gathering called for the outlawing of alien ownership of land and cessation of land grants to corporations, for direct election of U.S. Senators, for currency inflation, and for public ownership of the means of transportation and communication.¹⁷

Leading Democrats had no intention of adopting the reform demands of the farmers’ and workers’ convention. Such would have run counter to what V. O. Key called the “prevailing attitude” of post-Redeemer Texas governments. To be sure, agrarian Democrats proposed a state regulatory railroad commission at the 1888 party convention, but conservatives and railroad lobbyists defeated the measure. On the other hand, the party nominated the flamboyant anti-monopolist railroad commission supporter James S. Hogg as state attorney general.¹⁸

Disappointed in the Democrats’ lack of response, some in the Alliance then joined the Knights of Labor in the newborn Texas Union Labor Party to field a slate of “Independent-Fusion” candidates running on a revised Alliance-Knights Waco platform, which the Republicans tacitly endorsed by choosing not to field a slate. The reformers’ land plank called for the state to purchase foreign-owned land for resale to “actual settlers” and attacked concentrated holdings with demands for a punitive tax on speculatively held land. Independent-Fusion candidate Marion Martin—also endorsed by the Prohibitionists—got 28.2 percent of the vote statewide, mostly from normally Republican voters.¹⁹

Hunt County proved more Democratic than the state in 1888 with nearly 80 percent going to the Democrats. Countywide, the Independent-Fusion gubernatorial candidate received 23.2 percent of the vote, with rural voters supporting his effort at a higher level than town voters. While Marion Martin’s town votes came mostly from four Greenville precincts that usually cast a healthy minority for the GOP, the rural Martin vote came from precincts with no Republican tendencies. Thus, the 23.6 percent rural Hunt County vote for Marion Martin represented support for Alliance-Knights demands. Martin’s top five communities, Roberts, Maxey Hall, Vansickle, Bear Pen, and Jardin, gave him 38.2 percent. No geographical pattern emerged; high Independent voting occurred in both the blackland western half of the county and in the more heavily forested, mixed loam, eastern half of the county.²⁰

The new power of the Farmers’ Alliance began to command the Dem-

ocratic leadership's attention. Even as the national agrarian movement coalesced into the People's Party, Texas agrarians warily gave the Democrats another chance through the gubernatorial candidacy of James S. Hogg. The incumbent Texas attorney general, East Texan Hogg attracted the affection of the farm folk as much for his inspired campaign style as for anything else. A proponent of the proposed Railroad Commission, he made political hay from well-publicized confrontations with out-of-state monopolies and insurance companies. He appealed to rural people's egalitarianism as the first Texas Democratic gubernatorial nominee clearly not from the "genteel" school of the Redeemers' generation. Instead, Hogg spoke the language of the people, engaged in country humor from the stump, and rhetorically affirmed the everyday economic grievances of farmers against the railroads. When he ran for governor in 1890, Farmers' Alliance members supported him in the hope that a Hogg victory would ease the way for the creation of the Railroad Commission. Indeed, it did. The state convention that nominated Hogg also inserted a regulatory Railroad Commission into the Democratic platform. Despite the misgivings of its leadership, the Alliance then took the unprecedented step of issuing a formal endorsement. Exultant Alliancemen made the Democratic 1890 margin of victory the highest since the Civil War with over three out of four votes going to Hogg. In the Hunt County countryside Hogg garnered an astounding 94.7 percent of the vote, compared to a twenty-year rural Democratic average of 76.0 percent. For the victorious Democrats, however, this rural outpouring represented less of a mandate than a test from rural voters already made watchful by a rapidly changing economy and a decade of Greenbacker and Alliance agitation.²¹

The Railroad Commission, Governor Hogg, and the Democratic Party failed the test. Hogg ignored the Alliance's candidates for the appointive Railroad Commission, and those he did appoint did little to address farmers' grievances. In 1891 many Texas Alliancemen and others seeking "radical reforms" joined the new People's Party. The People's Party has received much analysis by historians excited by either animus or admiration. Most of the attention has been on their currency inflation schemes and proposals for government ownership of the means of transportation and communication. Yet land ownership did indeed appear early on as a major Populist concern in Texas and remained near the forefront of the movement through most of the 1890s. In 1891 the first state convention adopted proposals to make low-cost land available to farm families. They called for prohibition of alien land ownership,

prohibition of corporations owning more land than necessary to carry out business, forfeiture of land by corporations that had not fulfilled the terms of their grants (such lands to be held “for actual settlers only”), and prohibitive tax rates levied against lands held for speculation. Texas Populism’s land platform remained virtually unchanged through 1896.²²

The 1892 election tested the partisan loyalty of the Texas rural voter. The new People’s Party nominated State District Judge Thomas L. Nugent, a beloved figure with a reputation for kindness and honesty and an ideology at odds with the direction of the modern marketplace; Nugent was a Christian Socialist. At the Democratic state convention that year, Alliancemen supporting the subtreasury plan were denied their seats; they did not go quietly. Convening in Dallas as the “Jeffersonian Democrats” they reiterated their support for the subtreasury and listed other agrarian demands while still proclaiming loyalty to the Democratic Party. If that were not enough, the Democrats split yet another way. Hogg’s opponents in the pro-business wing of the Democratic Party mobilized behind railroad lawyer and lobbyist Judge George Clark who ran as the conservative alternative. Thus, by the time the election arrived, Hogg faced credible opponents on the left and the right. Statewide, Hogg received 43.7 percent of the 1892 vote. That was enough, however. Clark polled 30.6 percent, and Nugent trailed with 24.9 percent of the vote. The Republicans and Prohibitionists split the rest.²³

Still, the Populists polled over 100,000 votes and made a showing in the countryside in 1892. Even in staunchly Democratic Hunt County, with a tremendously popular agrarian governor, the Democrats lost much ground in the rural precincts. Even including Clark’s 6.6 percent, the Democratic Party lost over a third of their support from two years earlier. The Populists won 39.2 percent of the rural votes, over twice the proportion they received in towns. The former Hunt County Greenback strongholds especially supported the Populists, along with some new additions. Bear Pen, Hackberry, and White Rock were joined by nine other communities recording higher-than-average levels for the protest party. Clinton, a blackland farming community west of Greenville and a first-time voting precinct in 1892, returned a Populist majority of 64.1 percent from among its 167 voters.²⁴

This pattern of voting continued in Hunt County through 1898. In 1894 Nugent improved on his previous showing and won 36.1 percent of the statewide vote. Rural Hunt County went Populist in 1894, returning 53.5 percent for Nugent, continuing in the pattern set in 1892; eight of the eleven higher-than-average communities were back with huge mar-

gins of victory for the Populists. Clinton voters cast 86.2 percent of their ballots for the People's Party in the 1894 governor's race.²⁵

In 1896 rural Hunt Countians' overall support for Populism slipped to 43.1 percent, and in the election following the fusion fight of 1896 the weakened Populist Party garnered only 38.6 percent of the Hunt County rural vote. In every case the rural Populist vote outstripped town percentages. And, with only one or two exceptions, the continuing cadre of 1892 Populist communities led the rest of rural voters even as voting participation, and Populist totals, declined. By 1900 the dying Populist Party commanded only 6 percent of a now-diminished rural Hunt County vote (whose totals were at a fourteen-year low). Already disillusioned, the rural poor majority would soon be disfranchised as well.²⁶

During this period Democrats took care of the dissident rural voter problem with a poll tax. Despite years of resistance by the Populists, the State Federation of Labor, and rural dissidents, in 1901 the pro-poll tax forces managed to get a proposed constitutional amendment through the legislature. In 1902 the voters approved the poll tax amendment by referendum during the general election.²⁷ The 1903 state legislature then enacted statutes requiring payment of poll taxes to vote and mandated party primary elections. Historians have viewed this action in conflicting ways. The most well-known view, put forward by J. Morgan Kousser, argues that conservative Democrats aimed the poll tax at white Populists as well as blacks in an effort to assure their own continued dominance. Worth R. Miller disputes this interpretation, countering instead that Hogg Democrats, anxious to woo white ex-Populists back into the Democratic fold, chose black disfranchisement as a peace offering to assure white agrarians a majority coalition with Hogg progressives against both their conservative foes. Miller writes that the ex-Populists saw the poll tax as "a Reform Democrat offer of fair play. Third party association with blacks had justified overt suppression in the minds of otherwise honest and respectable white Texans in the 1890s."²⁸

Whatever the motivations behind the poll tax, its outcome was undeniable. The first election after the poll tax, 1904, saw the total number of Texas gubernatorial votes drop by over one third from the election of 1900 and nearly one-half from the Populists' best showing in 1896. In fact, it would take thirty-two years of population growth to re-obtain the 1896 vote total from the now-diminished electorate. Miller points out that the white Populist voter had never come close to making up a majority and that blacks had bolstered Populist totals. By making the Dem-

ocratic primaries whites-only affairs, the Democratic leadership finally corralled the troublesome white agrarians. With no hope of prevailing on their own, and now devoid of their former black allies, agrarians were forced into an unequal and dependent partnership with progressives.²⁹

Hunt County voted for the poll tax. Townspeople voted for the poll tax at a rate of 59.6 percent while rural voters were only slightly less enthusiastic at 55.2 percent. Significantly, however, town voters approved the poll tax in three-quarters of their precincts while rural voters rejected the poll tax in eleven out of twenty-seven boxes. A few Democratic strongholds joined the seven normally dissident communities in voting heavily against it. Clinton rejected disfranchisement 80 to 11, maintaining its position as the most reliably dissenting community in the county. Three of the seven usually leftist rural boxes, Clinton, South Sabine and Weiland, overwhelmingly rejected the poll tax by a combined vote of 72.6 percent.³⁰

Once approved, the poll tax immediately reduced the Hunt County electorate. The first presidential election after its adoption saw the number of votes fall from 6,374 in 1900 to 4,332 in 1904. Even more telling, the voter participation rate in gubernatorial elections fell from an estimated 74.3 percent in 1896 to 35.3 percent in 1912. Nor was this simply the result of disillusionment; even in 1900, just after the Populist Party's collapse, 55.9 percent of Hunt County's eligible voters had gone to the polls. Consider the community of Clinton. In 1892 it recorded a total of 167 votes, and maintained about that level of turnout through the 1896 election. In 1900 disillusionment with the dying Populist Party had set in, but still 113 of the community voted. Omitting off-year elections, this rural community averaged 144 voters between 1892 and 1900. The first year the poll tax was in effect the Clinton total dropped to 69 votes. In 1908 only 43 in the community cast ballots. Four years later, 71 Clintonians voted, still only an estimated one-fourth of the potential electorate. Between 1892 and 1912, the community of Clinton had seen its active electorate cut in half. Three percent of Clinton's 1,910 potential voters were African American, a figure very close to the Hunt County farming population in general. Like Clinton, the county's total rural vote plummeted from 2,800 voters in 1892 to less than half that in 1912. Whatever the poll taxers originally intended, the outcome in Hunt County was a disfranchising of the rural poor majority, white and black.³¹

The restructuring of Texas politics was pretty much complete by 1907. In that year, progressive Thomas M. Campbell took office as governor and presided over a series of reforms enacted by a progressive,

coattails legislature.³² But land reform proposals were prominently missing from the Democratic platforms of 1906–12. Through the poll tax the Democrats had shrunk the electorate and transferred new power to their party through the white primary, thus, according to Dewey Grantham, “limiting the possibility of mass protest at the ballot box.”³³ And, through the enactment of progressive reforms, they limited the likelihood of such protests even more. In spite of everything, however, a surprisingly numerous minority within the Texas yeomanry would make one last electoral stand against a system even then inexorably eroding the economic underpinnings of their way of life.

First, though, they tried a new version of an old idea with the birth of a Farmers’ Alliance-like organization called the Farmers’ Union. Ex-Allianceman, ex-Populist, and current socialist Newton Gresham founded the Farmers Union in 1902, near Point, Rains County. The Union took hold among Rains County farmers and then quickly spread across the state with a message of cooperative marketing to achieve higher prices. While 1900s cotton prices generally bested what they had been in the depressed 1890s, historian Theodore Saloutos calls these “illusory gains” for southern farmers due to overall higher costs. Additionally, debts left over from the 1890s, when cotton was bringing six cents a pound, reminded farmers of how temporal their good fortune might be. Estimates of statewide Union membership vary widely from a high of 400,000 at its peak in Texas (1905–1907) to as low as 37,000 for the same period.³⁴

Union leaders focused on cooperative marketing with the specific goal of maintaining cotton prices. They built cotton warehouses and advocated withholding cotton from the market. The Union’s first statewide meeting elected six East Texans to its ten state officer slots and two from Hunt County including Pres. N. C. Murray of the Kingston community. The Union claimed 100,000 Texas members by its second meeting.³⁵

Trouble dogged the new organization from the start. Leadership fights centered on party politics and personalities rather than the mission of the organization. First, the Democratic majority sought to cleanse the Union of radicals under the ironic banner of nonpartisanship. Suspicious Democrats accused the Union of attempting to revive the Populist Party, and Gresham and his successors sought to counter this with strict statements of nonpartisanship and the heavy recruitment of Democratic loyalists. In spite of this, the Union attracted Texas radicals such as Sam Hampton, L. L. Rhodes, and E. O. Meitzen. Rhodes seemed

determined to introduce Farmers' Union members to socialism, and the Union's state leadership appeared just as determined to "root out" such "men with radical tendencies." According to Walter Buenger, to the extent that it was effective, the Union remained so by ridding itself of any appearance of challenging the supremacy of the Democratic Party. "It also helped that the Farmers' Union never appeared as radical as the Farmers' Alliance or the Populist party." In practice, Buenger places the Farmers' Union somewhere "between labor unions and commercial clubs, the forerunners of the modern Chambers of Commerce. . . . Leadership on the local level remained in the hands of landowning farmers."³⁶ The Union both cooperated with town-based businessmen and, occasionally, competed with them. Some local business leaders supported new union warehouses because they saw the potential for increased trade. Use of such warehouses for withholding cotton from the market in an attempt to gain higher prices, however, found local businesses in opposition.

Of course, had it been successful in achieving higher cotton prices, tenants would have benefited. But, this goal remained elusive due to the economically inferior position of all farmers, even owners, in the international commodities marketplace. Although the Farmers' Union leadership sometimes adopted the sharp rhetoric of radicals (national president Charles S. Barrett referred to commodities traders as "blood-suckers"), clearly, the Farmers' Union was not radical and not even particularly reform-minded.³⁷ The Texas Union was a faintly progressive business association whose agenda was higher cotton prices.

While the Farmers' Union carried on a strong relationship with the Texas Federation of Labor, repeatedly including pro-labor resolutions in its annual platform statements, it was able to maintain itself as an acceptably broad-gauge "nonpartisan" movement.³⁸ This was true because its pro-labor pronouncements did not conflict with the interests of the local merchants and bankers with whom farmers dealt. It was also true that the Union's drive for higher prices for cotton growers no longer conflicted with those same local interests due to changes in the cotton economy. By the 1910s banks and merchants had abandoned cotton-buying themselves due to competition from bigger cotton-buying firms. Thus, the bankers and merchants (increasingly converting from credit to cash-only operations) wanted their customers to make more money. As Buenger has shown, this transformation explains why local creditors fought the Alliance of the 1880s and 1890s and supported the Farmers' Union of the 1900s and 1910s.³⁹

Historian Robert L. Hunt avers that 1906–1907 was the “most constructive” in the history of the Texas Farmers’ Union when “cotton warehouses were built all over Texas,” and there existed an impetus to “weld” cooperative marketing efforts. The banking “Panic of 1907” did much to weaken the Farmers’ Union as well as the position of farmers generally or any other market sector heavily dependent on credit. The Texas Union’s most tangible short-term achievements, the building of cotton storage warehouses for the purpose of cooperative cotton marketing, either collapsed or were purchased by non-farmer investors.⁴⁰

By 1914 the Farmers’ Union did not amount to much. It failed, according to Gilbert C. Fite, because of lack of money, lack of management know-how, “lack of a cooperative spirit among farmers,” as well as business opposition. Hunt, writing in 1935, lays the blame on “chaos” created by the “petty jealousies” of its leadership. Theodore Saloutos sees the Farmers’ Union’s chief weaknesses as opportunistic leadership, factionalism, dissatisfaction with general ineffectiveness, white racism—which cut it off from potential black economic allies—and “the lack of a common bond of interest between the poorer and more substantial farmers.” It is to this latter issue—class conflict—that James R. Green and Jim Bissett point out both weakened the Farmers’ Union and strengthened the Socialist Party among potential Union members in Oklahoma and Texas. Buenger likewise sees a direct connection between the Farmers’ Union in Texas and the Socialist Party: “Socialism clearly grew from Populism and from the Farmers’ Union.”⁴¹

Widespread ownership of land was the single most important economic issue for the plain folk community. By 1910, the majority of farmers in Texas no longer owned land. However, only one political party operating in Texas made land its central theme. More than anything else, this explains the level of support enjoyed by the Socialist Party of America from early-twentieth-century rural Texans.

A determined minority within the American labor movement began organizing socialist clubs in the United States in the 1870s. Concentrated among German-speaking northern urban industrial workers, these first organizations failed to make inroads among most of their fellow laborers. One early attempt at mobilizing the working class, the Socialist Labor Party, splintered and nearly collapsed in the early 1880s. The SLP managed to broaden its appeal temporarily through the leadership of writer Daniel De Leon. But, following a pattern typical of the period, De Leon’s insistence on absolute discipline and acquiescence to his interpretation of theory shrank membership and promoted schism. One

SLP faction, led by New York attorney Morris Hillquit, united with two midwestern groups, the utopian Social Democracy of America led by Eugene V. Debs and the pragmatic Wisconsin Socialists led by Victor Berger, to create the new Socialist Party of America in 1901.⁴²

Even before the birth of this new party, many of the most left-leaning Texas Populist leaders already worked to bring forth a Texas Socialist Party. William E. Farmer had been active in the agrarian protest movement almost from the beginning; having led in founding the People's Party, he also led the way out of it. In 1898 Farmer founded a Socialist Party in Fannin County that called for, among other things, an independent Socialist Republic of Texas. By 1900, however, Farmer directed the Texas efforts of the Social Democratic Party and endorsed Debs for president. The Texas party platform pointedly denounced fusion "with any capitalist or middle class political party." By 1902 Farmer chaired the Texas Socialist convention, which pledged its allegiance to the one-year-old SPA. Former Texas Greenbackers, Alliancemen, Knights of Labor, and Populists joined Farmer in key roles. The chairman of the 1900 Texas Social Democrats and later founding member of the Texas SPA, Sam Hampton of Fannin County, also had been a founding delegate of the Populist Party. Van Zandt County's former Populist state representative, Lee L. Rhodes, and his radical older brother, Jacob C. "Jake" Rhodes, brought much experience to the new party. Relative latecomer E. O. Meitzen traveled a similarly agrarian path to socialism. Joining the Grange in 1886, the next year he helped bring Lavaca County farmers into the Farmers' Alliance. In 1892 Meitzen served on the executive committee of the Jeffersonian Democrats but soon after quit the Democratic Party and, by 1896, had been twice nominated for state comptroller by the People's Party. After Populist collapse, Meitzen's son became interested in socialism and recruited his father. Eventually both father and son played active roles in the Texas Socialist Party.⁴³

At first Texas Socialists ignored the land question and attracted little support from the plain folk or any other folk. Statewide, its total vote comprised only a fraction of the support once given the Populists. In 1900 the Social Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Lee L. Rhodes, polled only a scattering of votes across the state, including sixty-one votes in Hunt County. Even so, there were already pockets of concentrated support among Hunt's formerly Populist precincts. Foreshadowing future trends, rural voters were twice as likely as town-dwellers to vote Socialist. Ever radical, over a fifth of the Clinton and Vansickle vote went to the Social Democratic candidate. Combined with the die-

hard Populist votes, Clinton and Vansickle returned 34.6 percent for the candidates of the left. The seven most reliably dissident precincts (Bear Pen, Clinton, Hackberry, South Sabine, Vansickle, Weiland, and White Rock) cast 17.5 percent of their ballots for the Populist and Social Democratic gubernatorial candidates, more than two-and-a-half times the level of support they garnered among Hunt County's town voters that year. Still, in 1900, the Social Democrats had very little to cheer them, and the next election (1902) did not look much better for the new party. Now officially allied with the Socialist Party of America, the Texans nominated W. W. Freeman of Val Verde County for governor, who received less than 1 percent of the vote statewide. Hunt County proved typical in returning only 0.8 percent (36 votes) of its ballots for the Socialist candidate. Again, however, what support Freeman received was concentrated among rural voters who proved more than three times as likely to vote Socialist as town voters. Voter participation plummeted in this off-year election (which also decided the fate of the poll tax), and a third fewer voters came to the polls in the seven usually dissident precincts, resulting in their overall leftist vote amounting to only 7.8 percent in 1902 for the Socialist and Populist candidates.⁴⁴

The recruitment of talented and experienced leadership constituted the movement's only successes during this period. Early on, Texas Socialists adopted the old Populist camp meeting, and East Texas Socialists in Grand Saline, Van Zandt County, organized the first and largest of these radical encampments. The party benefited immensely from its Van Zandt County leadership because of the Grand Saline encampment alone. During the first years of the movement, "self-educated" Grand Saline lawyer Richey Alexander served as state secretary. The Rhodes brothers lived nearby, and many other lecturers and organizers passed through this tiny hamlet, making Grand Saline swarm with Socialist activity. Van Zandt County native Enoch Fletcher (b. 1900) easily recalled Lee Rhodes's frequent street corner oratory: "I know that when I was a boy on Saturday when I would go to town, he would often make speeches . . . along about where the bank is now. . . . He was a good speaker. He always criticized capitalism. Their chief topic was that there was five percent of the people owned all the wealth of the country." George Smith, Rhodes's son-in-law, recalled the older man's eloquence with pride. "I tell you, I heard Mr. Rhodes in many a debate. I never . . . heard him in a debate that he didn't win. . . . He was a debater, now." Alexander also spoke on the street in Grand Saline in well-advertised appearances. Fletcher, himself not sympathetic to their politics, remem-

bered Alexander and the Rhodes brothers as respected and well-liked members of the community. Of Lee Rhodes he observed: "He was a good man morally." Soon-to-be Socialist Justice of the Peace Richey Alexander was a popular young man well regarded even by the local Democratic newspaper.⁴⁵

In mid-summer, after the crops had been laid by, Socialist camp meeting season began in Texas. From 1904 until at least 1916, the Grand Saline week-long camp meeting hearkened back to Populist and older religious traditions. Religion, of course, played a strong role in Van Zandt County socialism, as it did elsewhere among rural Texans. In fact, a rural Baptist preacher provided the site of the encampment, preached socialism there, and eventually ran for Congress on the Socialist Party ticket. Very much like a county fair, the Grand Saline camp meeting drew thousands of visitors to its many attractions, including the oratory of Eugene V. Debs and Kate Richard O'Hare. When Debs spoke there, George Smith "listened at his feet. . . . Oh, it thrilled you. Advocating good, they didn't advocate nothing bad." M. A. Smith often led the assemblage in prayer and song before treating them to a sermon on the immorality of the capitalist system. One rural socialist editor cheered Smith's Biblical presentations at the 1904 camp meeting, claiming that Smith's sermons "will always be a nightmare to all anti-Christians present who persist in calling Socialists skeptics and infidels." Grand Saline crowds also heard the orations of M. A. Smith's son, Wilford B. "Pitchfork" Smith, who had inherited his father's eloquence if not his piety. The irreverent and eccentric younger Smith published a socialist magazine in Dallas. On the stump at Grand Saline, "Pitchfork" Smith assured his listeners of his Jeffersonian faith in farmers' facility for self-government. Solutions to society's ills "must be thought out" by the "serious and thoughtful yeomanry" of the countryside. From such restrained ruminations Smith was likely to turn suddenly to more robust fare. At the 1911 encampment he scoffed at a local office-holder who had urged him to advise poor people to save their money to get out of poverty. Smith retorted that if a farmer or industrial worker saved all of their expected earnings every year, with never a cent spent on sustenance, they would, in fifty thousand years, be worth as much as Standard Oil heir William G. Rockefeller, who "has never earned enough money in his worthless life to pay for the diaper the doctor tied him up and weighed him in."⁴⁶

Those not interested in social criticism came to Grand Saline for the merry-go-round, lemonade, and excitement of a huge throng. Young people courted, while the pious sang of and prayed for the coming of

the Cooperative Commonwealth. Across America the leftist press paid homage to their "Texas Comrades" for the Grand Saline gathering. The *Chicago Daily Socialist* assured its readers that the encampment proved wrong "any one [who] imagines there is anything slow about our southern comrades." The *Appeal to Reason* and the *Milwaukee Social-Democratic Herald*, as well as a number of Texas Socialist and Democratic papers, publicized the event for attracting thousands each day of its week-long run. George Smith recalled the crowds with awe. "Oh, man. It was an awful gathering of people. They'd be thousands of people there. Thousands of them. . . . It was kind of like a picnic. Had all kinds of things. Had a rodeo." The success of this gathering fostered the growth of hundreds of other such encampments in Texas, Oklahoma, and as far away as South Dakota.⁴⁷

Van Zandt County became the early headquarters of the Texas Socialist Party by the strength of its encampment and local leadership. Prominent among the party's leaders was Jake Rhodes. Born in Mississippi, after the Civil War he and his family came to East Texas where he taught "for many years" in Van Zandt County country schools. By the turn of the century his "old pupils" could be "found in every part of the county." He raised a family, educating both his sons and daughters, was active in his church, and occasionally did some preaching. Over time he became ever more radicalized through membership in the Farmers' Alliance and the Knights of Labor. A public speaker of some renown, he worked for the People's Party during the 1890s before converting to socialism. After 1902 he organized for the Farmers' Union, although he was never in perfect harmony with its goals. A nationally sought-after lecturer, a man who "live[d] much in his library," Jake Rhodes became an orthodox socialist comfortable with the notion of total collectivization of land ownership.⁴⁸

Voting behavior in Van Zandt County reflected the influence of the state's most well-known socialists. In the climactic election of 1912, one Van Zandt County precinct reelected Justice of the Peace Richey Alexander and chose a socialist constable. Jake and Lee Rhodes also garnered almost a third of the county's votes in their bids for county judge and state representative.⁴⁹

Texas Socialists at first proved wary of committing themselves on the land issue. The first specific position on land came in the 1904 platform, which divided all resources into the two categories of products of labor and "the natural heritage of the human race, the land." The platform proclaimed that "this struggle" pitted those who created wealth against

those who expropriated the produce of both land and labor. Indicting the Democratic and Republican Parties as “the committee of the whole of the capitalist class,” Texas socialists declared that workers “must be collectively in possession of and have free access to the land and machinery” denied them under capitalism. They went no further in laying out the details of just what this would mean regarding farms. That year the party nominated Word H. Mills of Dallas for governor, Lee Rhodes for lieutenant governor, and M. A. Smith of Hunt County for attorney general. Mills did no better than Freeman, receiving 2,487 votes statewide, just under 1 percent of the total. In Hunt County the trend of higher rural support was briefly interrupted. Receiving 1.4 percent (61 votes) of the total county vote, Mills’s town percentages ran slightly ahead of his vote in the rural precincts, with the feeble Populist Party still absorbing the angriest rural votes. Taken together, however, the Populist-Socialist vote garnered a higher percentage in the countryside than in town. Of the normally dissenting precincts, only Clinton and Weiland returned Socialist votes in 1904, with Clinton casting 9 of its 69 votes (13.0 percent) for Mills. Together, the Populist-Socialist vote represented only 3.9 percent of the rural vote countywide, however. Clearly, by 1904 the Populist Party existed in name only, and the new Socialist Party appealed to only a few rural voters within the newly truncated electorate.⁵⁰

Still struggling for a foothold, the Texas Socialist Party consisted of only twenty-six locals in 1905. Along with the locals in Van Zandt, North and East Texas contained small memberships in Dallas, Grayson, Lamar, and Smith Counties. Altogether, these four locals claimed a membership of seventy-one. In Hunt County the former Populist community of Clinton boasted a seven-member local in 1905. A Rains County socialist newspaper proclaimed that the “Hunt County boys . . . know what Socialism is and what it is not. And they are not afraid to tell it.”⁵¹

The following election year the small Texas movement again ignored the land issue. Instead, in 1906 the party declared its allegiance to international socialism, including the belief that “all those things upon which the people in common depend shall by the people in common be owned and administered.” Under socialism the machinery of production would belong to its “creators and users,” work for profit would be replaced by production “for the direct use of the producer,” and, in a declaration that would be relentlessly used against them by their white supremacist opponents, Texas Socialists affirmed that “opportunities shall be open and equal to all men” and called for abolition of the poll tax. The platform

recognized farmers as one "type" of worker and included them in the working class. Whether in town or country, society had but two classes, however: "The one toils without enjoying; the other enjoys without toiling." Like the industrial worker, the farmer, too, was exploited by capitalism.⁵²

In 1906 the Socialist Party nearly doubled its previous showing. The number of Socialist votes increased only slightly, but since 1906 was an off-year election, a smaller overall turnout boosted the party's percentage to 1.6 percent. The party nominated George C. Edwards for governor. This former Dallas public school teacher had been fired for his political beliefs and now edited Dallas' trade union newspaper, the *Laborer*. With strong ties to the Dallas labor movement, the Harvard-educated Edwards had little connection to the countryside. Nevertheless, rural favorites Lee Rhodes and M. A. Smith took their usual spots as candidates for lieutenant governor and attorney general, and the party nominated newcomer Ernest R. Meitzen for railroad commissioner.⁵³

The 1906 SPA state ticket gained only slight ground over its last showing in Hunt County. Despite both the lack of a clear land plank or a suitably countrified gubernatorial candidate, most Socialist gains occurred in rural precincts, where their percentage increased two-and-a-half times to 2.9 percent. The town precincts voted for Edwards only at the rate of 1.6 percent. Militant Clinton and Weiland stayed the course with a combined 24.1 percent Socialist vote, alone among the normally dissenting seven to return any SPA ballots. Only fifty-one Hunt Countians cast Socialist ballots in 1906; thus far, the SPA had failed to replace the moribund Populists as the party of protest in the Hunt County countryside.⁵⁴

At the 1908 Socialist Party national convention, pragmatists tried to soften the party's stance on land collectivization. The compromisers sought to reassure farmers that it was "not essential to the Socialist program that any farmer shall be dispossessed of the land which he himself occupies and tills." Ironically, Texans helped lead the fight against compromise and made some of the most dogmatically collectivist speeches of the convention. Jake Rhodes brought the debate to the crux of the matter by casting the land question as a contest only between landlords and tenants. As a former organizer for the Farmers' Union, he warned of the dire consequences of landlord influence. Anyone who bemoaned calls for collectivization was not a real farmer anyway, according to Rhodes, but was instead "the man who farms the farmer." Ever the purist, Rhodes argued that if railroads should not be exempted from pub-

lic ownership in order to woo the votes of railroad stockholders, then land should not be treated any differently either. "This movement is a working-man's movement[,] a proletarian movement, and I believe we should make our propaganda to the working people of this country, and forget that a man is a mechanic or a farmer or a stone-cutter or what he is." Texans Laura B. Payne and Stanley Clark took similar stands and helped to persuade the convention to reject the land compromise.⁵⁵

Texas Socialists nominated Jake Rhodes for governor following his return from the 1908 national convention. M. A. Smith was again nominated for attorney general, while the nomination for lieutenant governor passed to young Nat B. Hunt of Smith County. The party re-adopted its 1906 platform without change. In spite of this, Jake Rhodes's 1908 candidacy would prove to be a breakthrough of sorts for the seven-year-old party. Rhodes won 8,100 votes statewide, or 1.6 percent. Greater partisan interest always boosted Democratic and Republican vote totals in presidential election years, and despite the fact that the SPA's share did not increase over 1906, its total vote more than doubled. This proved true in Hunt County as well with a 200 percent increase. Further, the town-country division strongly reappeared. Rhodes collected over half of his votes from the country boxes, although the thin rural electorate now accounted for less than a third of the whole. Hunt County's town voters gave Rhodes only 2.3 percent of their vote while the rural precincts returned 6.2 percent. The seven usually rebellious precincts voted a combined 8.0 percent for Jake Rhodes, even with two of the boxes returning no SPA ballots. Reliable Clinton cast 30.2 percent of its votes for socialism. And the new voting boxes at Mexico and Mina returned Socialist votes of 42.9 and 37.3 percent respectively.⁵⁶

Gradually, the cultural imperatives of the plain folk themselves prevailed upon the party to reassess its position on land. Desiring rural support, and learning from rural people the weakness of their collectivist position on land, in 1909 the SPA held a nationwide referendum on a version of the failed 1908 farm compromise. Obviously, its sponsors believed that if the decision could bypass the party elite, the local activists who made up the dues-paying rank-and-file would support it. They did. After 1909 the party would cease demanding the unqualified collectivization of land. State parties were then left with the responsibility of working out the practical meaning of the compromise. The resulting Texas land plank more closely resembled the aspirations of the rural poor majority and helps to explain the dramatic rise in Socialist voting in Texas after 1909.⁵⁷

The rise of new leadership in the Texas party accompanied the shift in land policy. Northeast Texans led the early movement with the most visible leaders coming from Fannin and Van Zandt Counties. In 1910, however, the party flaunted its growth with nominees for state office from across the state representing Northeast, Central, South Central, and West Texas counties. The 1910 Texas platform contained eighteen separate provisions. The first of these called for increased democracy through the initiative, referendum, recall, female suffrage, abolition of the poll tax, and "the unrestricted right of peaceable assembly, free speech, and free press." The platform also promised relief to industrial labor through the adoption of labor's traditional wages, hours, child labor, workplace safety, and insurance demands. The Socialists promised "humane and scientific" treatment of prisoners and the insane, a system of socialized health care, free public school textbooks, maintenance of "destitute children," and the extension of political asylum to oppressed peoples.⁵⁸

The platform also prominently featured the new land policy, which dropped calls for collectivization. The Socialists called for an end to sales of public lands and the reclamation of all leased land after the current leases expired. The platform demanded that all lands sold for taxes should be bought by the state and added to the public domain and that foreign landowners should appraise their own holdings for taxation purposes, with the state having the right to purchase such holdings at the appraised value plus 10 percent. Any land held for "exploitation and speculation" (land farmed by tenants or hired labor or unoccupied land owned by individual speculators or corporations) would be subject to an annual graduated land tax roughly equal to a year's rental income, thus forcing the landlord to sell on reasonable terms to tenants or forfeit ownership to the government. On public lands tenants could apply for ownership of farms and pay a normal rent-share to the state until one-half the land's market value had been met, after which they would be issued "a permanent right of occupancy." Further, the Socialists promised that their election would mean tax exemption for the "tools, teams, and implements of landless farmers" up to eight hundred dollars. The platform also called for public ownership of gins and other agricultural processing facilities that were "in their nature public."⁵⁹

For the Socialists this represented a compromise between the yeomanry's desire for both family-based ownership and a more equitable distribution of that ownership. Further, the graduated land tax would protect against future individual aggrandizement. The crucial drawback of this land plank, as far as plain folk traditions were concerned, was its

lack of specificity regarding inheritance rights. Small farmers fervently desired to hand down their farms to the next generation. The SPA may have hurt its own cause by not clearly protecting this tradition in the 1910 platform. But with the compromise land plank they had mustered, Texas Socialists optimistically embarked upon their 1910 gubernatorial campaign.

The 1910 mass meeting in Corpus Christi confirmed choices made by the rank-and-file in the nominating referendum. Because of the increasingly democratic process, nominations went to residents of all regions of the state except the far southwest. Of the first generation of party leaders, only M. A. Smith maintained his string of state nominations with the attorney general's slot. The gubernatorial nod went to Reddin Andrews of Tyler. A die-hard Populist, Andrews's status as a Baptist educator and minister, Confederate veteran, and outspoken prohibitionist served the party well in its search for rural support. As revolutionary as his message might be, Andrews possessed a comforting degree of cultural familiarity.⁶⁰

The 1910 election results justified the party's optimism. In an off-year election with participation down, the Socialists captured over a third more votes than they had polled two years earlier in the governor's race. Andrews received 11,538 ballots statewide, or 5.3 percent, double the Socialists' share in 1908. In Hunt County, Andrews did better than any Socialist candidate before with 230 votes, or 7.8 percent. Significant gains appeared in the Hunt County countryside, where rural voters were twice as likely as town voters to choose the SPA. Furthermore, militant yeomen had nearly a full slate of county nominees to support, including Greenville feed store owner C. E. Obenchain for state representative, and, for county treasurer and public school superintendent, the only women on the county ballot. Doubtlessly the presence of candidates for county commissioner and justice of the peace made for increased awareness of the Socialist slate. Socialist support proved consistent down the ballot, with only four votes separating the largest SPA vote-getter from the least. Andrews polled 11.5 percent among rural voters, and in the seven dissenting precincts he claimed 16.0 percent. Again, two of the seven historically dissident precincts returned no SPA votes at all while chronically discontented Clinton cast 21 of its 43 ballots for Reddin Andrews and the Socialist Party. The tiny but disaffected communities of Mexico and Mina returned 35.6 and 38.5 percent respectively. In a few precincts, then, the Socialists were beginning to claim levels of support reminiscent of Populism.⁶¹

In 1910 socialism was the fastest growing political movement in Texas. Its share of the 1910 vote represented nearly a 500 percent increase over 1904. Since 1906 the Texas SPA had more than doubled its gubernatorial total in each election.⁶²

Between the campaigns of 1910 and 1912 a powerful new voice joined the cause. In June 1911 Joshua Hicks sold his Socialist weekly the *Farmer's Journal* of Abilene to E. O. and Ernest Meitzen, who in turn brought in veteran organizer Thomas A. "Red Tom" Hickey to edit a weekly newspaper they named the *Rebel*. For the next six years the *Rebel* served as the state party's quasi-official organ. Hickey's single greatest contribution was in identifying "the land question" as the issue closest to the hearts and minds of the state's poor majority. "Land is the issue!" the *Rebel* proclaimed, greatly assisting the work of organizers and lecturers in sparking the growth of rural support for Texas Socialist candidates.⁶³

The Texas Socialist press ranks nearly equally to rural economic distress and rural moral traditions in explaining the notable short-term success of the Texas Socialist Party. The southwest's agrarian fields had long been cultivated by the old Populist-then-Socialist publication, *The Appeal to Reason*, which had moved from Tennessee to Kansas. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated in building the foundation for the movement. As socialism's following grew in Texas, so too did its press. By 1912 there were at least a dozen socialist publications statewide, and local socialists contributed weekly columns and letters to the editor in other papers.⁶⁴

Tom Hickey and the *Rebel* streaked across the Texas political firmament like a meteor. From its start in 1911 the *Rebel* quickly grew to a major force in the Texas party, with a subscription list of over twenty thousand a year after its founding. Much of its success stemmed from the fertile ground of discontent upon which Hickey worked. Hickey crafted his rhetoric to appeal to the predominant culture of the Texas rural majority. For example, he featured a ninety-five-year-old comrade who had once before "saved" Texas as a young soldier at the Battle of San Jacinto and who "now . . . is in the battle with his red card, determined to save his state" again. Further, knowing that hierarchical discipline held little appeal for the rural majority, Hickey fought for decentralization, believing that democratization went a long way toward staving off schism and bolstering the party's phenomenal growth. For all of his self-promotion and personal bombast, Hickey's talents really did make a difference for the Texas party.⁶⁵

Tom Hickey showed off some of his considerable talents in an ad-

dress delivered in Dallas in June 1911. Replying to critics who contended that socialists sought to confiscate and “divide-up,” Hickey retorted that while the average worker annually produced \$2,482 worth of goods and services, average wages were only \$437 per year. Hickey roared that “we place a palace on the hill, and we live in a shack; we produce broadcloth and we wear shoddy, we produce silks and our good wives wear calico. We send our children to four months of school, their children graduate from the Universities of Europe.” He compared Vivian Gould’s \$60,000 trousseau to the “eight foot cotton sacks” trailing after farm women. Hickey taunted the Democratic audience, assuring them that he could encapsulate their entire existence in one slicing summation: “You were born in poverty, raised on the installment plan, and will die in Republican debt, God help you.” That, Hickey informed his listeners, “is the only dividing up that takes place.”⁶⁶

Hickey came across as a racial bigot in some of his writing, and while that did not hurt the Socialist Party with most Texas voters, it violated the party’s ideology. The party stood for racial equality, which was usually embraced by its most well-known spokesman, Eugene Debs. But because of the party’s decentralized structure, nobody could have censured Hickey had there been such an inclination.⁶⁷ Great diversity existed between state organizations. Oklahoma Socialists took a stand against racial disfranchisement. Texas Socialists, in disarray during the poll tax election, took no such stand then, although they denounced the poll tax by 1904. Beyond a handful of spokesmen, we have little to go on when it comes to rank-and-file agrarian radicals’ racial beliefs, but it is easy to surmise given the preponderance of racism in their culture. There were notable exceptions. Joshua Hicks, the Christian Socialist whose *Farmers’ Journal* evolved into the *Rebel*, explicitly denounced white supremacy.⁶⁸

Those farmers who owned no land continued to be discontented. The rapidly fading Texas Farmers’ Union had sought only to represent the interests of farm owners, and, as Buenger observes, “tenant farmers and sharecroppers never played a leadership role in the organization.” Texas tenants found their voice in 1911 with the formation of the Land Renters’ Union. A group of Falls County tenants called for a nonpartisan tenant farmers’ union, with membership restricted to “land renters and farm laborers” only. The union sought to eliminate tenancy’s worst abuses and to ease tenant land purchases. While nonpartisan, the organization never envisaged being nonpolitical and immediately called for abolition of bonuses and money rents, reduction of rents, and the

abolition of blacklisting based on "religious or political views." The organizers declared that the "renters of Texas are steadily sinking from year to year to an ever lower standard of living. Homes are ever harder to secure and peonage faces the present and future generations."⁶⁹ While it tried to avoid being too obviously identified with the Socialist Party, the Renters' Union did declare for "use and occupancy as the only title to land." Indeed, Hickey and the *Rebel* helped to organize the union, and socialists W. S. Noble and E. O. Meitzen served as secretary and organizer. This "Socialist orientation and radical flavor" caused committed Democrats to avoid the organization.⁷⁰

Evils accompanying the rise of landlord power, according to the union, included dictatorial contracts, the overworking of women and children, soil infertility through over cropping, high land prices, poor housing, and poor health. The unionists petitioned the 1913 legislature to submit two constitutional amendments to the voters, one allowing a tax on land held for speculation and the other declaring "use and occupancy" to be the only valid title to land. They demanded a stand from every candidate and promised to support any candidate willing to endorse their positions.⁷¹

With the coming of the European war in August 1914, the Renters' Union called for what was essentially a "stay law" reminiscent of the 1786 agrarian crisis in the new United States. While no Shays' Rebellion erupted in Texas, the Union did call for a special session of the state legislature. E. O. Meitzen, by then the secretary of the Renters' Union, called on Gov. Oscar B. Colquitt to push through legislation putting off execution of liens on crops until the following year. Meitzen pointed out that the federal government was taking extraordinary precautions to protect the interests of businesses but that "the small farmer and the tenant farmer" would receive no such protection. Meitzen warned that liens and "rentals" collected in the fall of 1914 would occur with "the price of the crops depreciated to the lowest possible point." The state did not respond. Cotton prices dropped over forty percent.⁷²

The Renters' Union's greatest failure was racial exclusivity, as at first it organized whites only. After the timber workers' interracial union proved such was possible in Texas, the Renter's Union then authorized segregated African American and Mexican American locals. Attempting to navigate the dangerous waters of early-twentieth-century racism in Texas was not a simple matter. Hickey praised African American boot blacks for organizing a union, gave stump speeches in Spanish, and admired the militancy of Mexican American Socialist Party and Renters'

Union locals in the counties around San Antonio. But he did so cautiously. Green writes that Hickey and "other Texas Socialists accepted the limits of share tenants' class consciousness."⁷³

The socialist movement peaked in 1912. Once more the SPA convention nominated Eugene V. Debs for president. More than any other figure, Debs would represent turn-of-the-century American socialism for succeeding generations. But in 1912, his supporters had to battle serious rivals for the SPA presidential nomination, and Debs professed surprise that the party had once more nominated him. Thanking Hickey and other Texas "wheel horses" and "warriors" for their support, Debs wrote of his friend Ed Green in Milam County and Hickey, E. R. Meitzen, and W. S. Noble that "you four alone . . . represent nearly 25 feet of the revolution."⁷⁴

In the spring of 1912 Socialist Party delegates convened in Indianapolis in an optimistic atmosphere leavened with concerns over fundamental disagreements. Overjoyed by several local victories, Socialists dared to hope for even larger electoral triumphs. But the *New York Times* predicted a significant schism over the party's relationship with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and mocked Socialist claims of rising strength. Furthermore, the matter of land ownership still dogged the national party. Although Texas and Oklahoma had adopted land ownership compromises for small farmers, the national party still had no land policy. Twelve Texas delegates attended the fractious Indianapolis convention.⁷⁵

A left-right confrontation brewed ominously. Midwesterners and New Yorkers sought to take the party toward pragmatism and electability, while the left, symbolized by Debs, saw this as an intolerable compromise with capitalism. The party's right sought to deny Debs the presidential nomination in favor of the more conservative mayor of Milwaukee, Emil Seidel; in spite of the right's command of convention apparatus, the Hoosier revolutionary prevailed. The Texas delegation's vote on the presidential nomination proved little in regard to land policy. As would be expected, left-wing collectivists such as Smith and Jake Rhodes voted for Debs, but Hickey and Meitzen, leaders of the Texas land compromisers, did likewise.⁷⁶

The matter of union endorsement further tested party consensus at the 1912 convention. The right sought an endorsement of the American Federation of Labor, while the left backed the IWW. The labor committee, including IWW-supporter Hickey, managed a compromise committing the party to neutrality. This did not prevent a final left-right

showdown, however. The confrontation centered on the moderates' and conservatives' attempt to outlaw "direct action" by party members, in the wake of a wave of negative publicity following the *Los Angeles Times* bombing case, linked by the press with West Coast Wobblies. Despite heated protest from the left, the convention voted by a 2-1 margin for expelling party members who advocated "violence as a weapon of the working class." Five Texas delegates, including Hickey and Jake Rhodes, opposed the amendment. Jake Rhodes was one of the few who exhibited ideological consistency.⁷⁷

Various forces within the party called for a land compromise in the national platform. These included the Texas agrarians, Algie M. Simons of Chicago, who had pushed a similar compromise in 1908, and Kate Richard O'Hare, a Grand Saline regular. O'Hare argued that the small farm owner was no capitalist but through continued economic exploitation had joined the ranks of the proletariat. In sum, the compromise attempted to woo the vote of the small land-owning farmer by guaranteeing his property rights. The party's left found this hard to take, and the debate was on.⁷⁸

The Texas delegation held widely differing views. George C. Edwards argued for the compromise, convinced that neither the rural majority nor the party faithful wanted total collectivization. He asked the delegates: "Do you want to have a wagon and a corn crib socially owned and democratically administered?" Richey Alexander, the twenty-five-year-old co-organizer of the Grand Saline encampment, implored the convention not to deprive Texans of an answer to the charge "that you Socialists want to take away the ownership of even our garden plot." Instead, he asked the delegates to remember that the "thoroughly accepted position of the Socialist Party the world over is that we do not propose to force every inch of land into public ownership, but that we are opposed to the private ownership of land only to the extent that it is used for exploitation." Unlike his brother, Lee Rhodes liked the land compromise, too, although purely for pragmatic reasons. Urging northerners to sympathize with the special conditions of the South, Rhodes plaintively asserted: "We are just as radical as you are; we stand for what you people of the north stand for but you have never had to contend with the Bourbon democracy of the South."⁷⁹

Only one Texan took up the battle for the left on the floor of the convention. C. A. Byrd of Port Arthur called for an unequivocal stand for complete collectivization, one reminiscent of Jake Rhodes's argument four years earlier. According to Byrd, socialism meant "taking the earth

and the fullness thereof for all the people.” Replying to Alexander, Byrd declared that he, too, was confronted by Texans demanding to know “what are you going to do about the land question? And I say, ‘Thus saith the Lord: The land shall not be sold forever for the land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.’” To Byrd, socialism meant that the people should “own the whole earth . . . and reduce government to a science of producing and distributing the wealth, based on labor.” Others attacked the land compromise as well, but their arguments failed to sway the convention, which incorporated the guarantee of small farmers’ property rights into the national platform.⁸⁰

The Socialist Party of America’s comprehensive new farm policy contained guidelines to assist state government in the event of a Socialist victory. The means of transportation and storage of crops and manufacture of farm equipment, “when such means are used for exploitation,” were to become publicly owned and “democratically administered.” A land tax would deny the profit from speculation, and land ownership would be through “use and occupancy” only; however—and this was the central feature—land owners using and occupying their own land would be protected in their ownership. The government would retain all present public land and would acquire more through “purchase, condemnation, taxation, or otherwise” in order to set up cooperative farms. Such farms would act as distribution centers for agricultural education and improved seeds and animals. The government would encourage present farm cooperative ventures and provide insurance to farmers against disease, pests, and natural disasters. Former tenants would work on socially administered farms, thus eliminating the system of tenancy. The convention voted down an attempt to append a disclaimer characterizing the 1912 farm policy as only the party’s short-term goals and re-emphasizing the party’s long-range “commitment” to total collectivization. Perhaps one of the most important features of the policy was its promise of flexibility, so that each state could adjust to meet regional “variations.”⁸¹

This flexibility went a long way toward holding the movement together, especially in Texas. Schism was a constant tendency in ideologically driven leftist parties. Within the Texas party there was division, but not schism, between those of varying stripes. Indeed, there had been struggles earlier, and the collectivists had given way to those seeking an agrarian compromise. The *Rebel* asserted that party cohesion in Texas ironically resulted from the victory of the “decentralizers” over those who sought tighter discipline. Rules changes denuded the state execu-

tive committee of its former power, and party members chose nominees for state office by referendum rather than in convention. Thus, the party maintained a place for both its left and right flanks. Between 1910 and 1912 the Texas SPA increased its membership by 200 percent and increased the number of Texas Socialist newspapers five times, success that helped to minimize internecine disputes.⁸²

It was with great optimism, then, that Texas Socialists convened in Waco on August 13, 1912. The 1912 platform featured Texas Socialists' obligatory blast at capitalism, which had "fulfilled its historic mission" and had "become utterly incapable of meeting the problems now confronting society." Capitalism was "incompetent and corrupt" and "the source of unspeakable misery and suffering to the entire working class of the Lone Star State." The first specific charge showed that the leadership finally understood the cause of country discontent: "Under this system the land of the State of Texas has passed into the hands of the few." The platform wrapped up its critique of capitalism in language remarkably similar to the Renters' Union declaration of the previous year: "Landlords demand contracts that interfere with the political and personal liberty of the tenant, as well as the manner in which he cultivates his crop. Through this system of tenantry [*sic*] that is inherent in the capitalist system, overcropping and single cropping is causing the soil to lose its fertility and thereby the present and future generations are robbed. The increase in land values has made it impossible for the tenant under ordinary conditions to buy and pay for land."

The platform then denounced private ownership of the means of manufacturing. A multitude of other maladies could be laid at the feet of capitalism, including "the increasing burden of armaments, poverty, slums, child labor, and most of the insanity, crime, and prostitution that afflicts mankind." Reflecting Hickey's vocal anti-prohibitionism (Anheuser-Busch was a major *Rebel* advertiser), the platform announced that Texas Socialists looked "with scorn upon the alleged reformers who seek to abolish the profits of saloon keepers while allowing trust magnates to riot in their profits." Hypocritically chivalrous southern elites lived off the sweat of women and children "under the blazing sun" of the Texas cotton patch, which ruined women physically and mentally and stole from children their "natural heritage" of education. The "plutocracy of Texas" unjustly wielded all political power and robbed the "wealth producers." Society consisted of two "warring groups," and the Texas SPA sought to identify itself with the "material interest" of the wealth producers, the working class. The platform committed the

party to “the complete overthrow of the capitalist system and the installation of the Socialist republic in its stead.”⁸³

Until that happy occasion, the Socialists contented themselves with a list of twenty-one demands aimed at immediate relief; a third of these related to farming. The new land policy comprised the centerpiece of the new platform. Private ownership of land “occupied and used in a useful and *bona fide* manner” would be protected, while those who owned land for “exploitation and speculation” would face a confiscatory tax. The platform called for private cooperatives, which would receive state backing. It promised to rent land from the public domain to tenants for “a nominal rent,” render farm implements “used without exploitation” tax exempt, strive for public ownership of all gins and related enterprises, and endorsed low-interest state loans to farmers. Missing, however, was the 1910 promise of state renters receiving a “permanent right of occupancy” after paying one-half the market value of their land in rent.⁸⁴

The rest of the platform demanded a host of fundamental changes in the political process, economy, and society. Calls for greater democracy included a demand for “free and equal suffrage” for women; the abolition of the poll tax; the implementation of the referendum, initiative, and recall; an end to the state senate and the governor’s veto; and a plea for “absolute freedom of press, speech and assemblage.” The convention swore the Texas SPA to establish an eight-hour workday for labor, enforce workplace safety, enact workers’ compensation laws, outlaw blacklisting, and abolish child labor. The delegates called for free and compulsory education, free textbooks, universal vocational education, state support for “destitute and near-destitute” children, and free night school for adults. They promised humane treatment to prisoners, a graduated income tax, and socialized health care.⁸⁵

Still high on his 1910 showing, Texas Socialists again conferred their gubernatorial nomination on Reddin Andrews. The party recognized Thomas Hickey’s new clout by nominating him for lieutenant governor. Party members nominated Austin labor lawyer Henry Faulk for attorney general, the elder Meitzen for chief justice, and Dan D. Richardson, the Grand Saline Baptist preacher and encampment supporter, and J. M. Haggard of Gainesville for congressmen-at-large.⁸⁶

Socialists hit the hustings to find a militant minority of plain folk ready to support them. Texas agrarian writer Nat L. Hardy dismissed concerns over farmers’ membership in the working class by arguing that farms were rapidly “being put on a factory basis,” with capitalists control-

ling the necessities of crop production. The same class exploited both farmers and workers, Hardy asserted, while tenants found their situation worsening, with signs that personal liberties would be further curtailed. Reports circulated of renters evicted for their dissident politics.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, organizers of dozens of summer and early autumn Socialist picnics and encampments tried to draw farmers to the cause. Hickey enjoyed a heightened popularity as stump speaker, but from the road he confessed his exhaustion to E. R. Meitzen and asked his publisher to please let the "comrades" know that he was not a "phonograph." Jake Rhodes spoke in seven different communities in the space of a week. M. A. Smith, Lee Rhodes, the recently converted G. G. Hamilton, and over two dozen other party speakers toured the state. The *Rebel* requested that such itinerants mail in Democratic "hides" taken in debate; Lee Rhodes responded that he could not comply because he had the hide of East Texas Congressman Martin Dies nailed to his barn door. J. C. Thompson, future mentor of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, inflicted such an agonizing defeat on one opponent, the *Rebel* claimed, that the victim required the attentions of a doctor "who is undertaking to graft another new hide into the place of the one recently shipped to this office."⁸⁸

Reddin Andrews viewed rural discontent with optimism. Like Debs, he believed he was witnessing the makings of revolution. Farmers, Andrews admitted, had been "unduly conservative" in the past, but now they were "fast becoming . . . students of economics." Consequently, "thousands, if not millions, are becoming class conscious Socialists." Andrews asserted that the success of the movement rested in the hands of the rural population. Taking a page from Debs's 1908 presidential campaign, the Texas SPA scheduled a "whirlwind campaign" for Andrews and Hickey on their own Texas "Governor's Red Special." Wrote Andrews, "Our time is ripe for the pending revolution." In language guaranteed to command the attention of the yeomanry, Baptist preacher Andrews characterized the contest in the starkest imagery possible: "A vote for Socialism is a vote for God and humanity. A vote against Socialism is a vote for the Devil and the politician." In September Debs came to Texas; he was treated like a visiting head of state in San Antonio and packed an auditorium "to the roof" in Houston. He exulted that a new order of society would soon be arriving. Matching Andrews' pious rhetoric with passionate humanist pronouncements of his own, Debs wrote in the *Rebel* that "every homeless brother challenges the validity of my title; every sorrowing sister rebukes my Christless

complacency, and every neglected child smites my conscience in the name of Humanity.”⁸⁹

On the national level, 1912 was the year of the party’s moderate faction, which sought common ground with the middle class. A win in the mayoral race in Schenectady, New York, and Victor Berger’s election to Congress from Milwaukee lent credibility to their position. Seeking to mute talk of class conflict, this group wanted progressives’ votes and even sought to recast the small businessman in his “true garb as a wage worker.” They fought to calm middle-class fears of abolition of private property, just as agrarians sought to do with small farmers. Many of these Socialists consisted of middle- and upper-class reformers who agreed with Hillquit that poor people were “the sport and play-thing of their economic masters,” completely “incompetent mentally” to lead the party. Debs disagreed vehemently, irritated both by the Socialist right’s class bigotry and what he considered their unprincipled opportunism. Debs charged that chasing the “will-o’-the-wisp of political office” prevented the party from accurately representing the working class. Like the industrial unionist that he was, Debs believed policy should be made by workers themselves. Further, he hated to see the desire for votes cause Socialists “to hold out inducements and make representations which are not at all compatible with the stern and uncompromising spirit of a revolutionary party.”⁹⁰

Still, even Debs must have rejoiced at the support his party received in some states in the presidential election of 1912. The Socialists captured 6 percent in the presidential race—almost a million votes—doing better percentage-wise than the SPA had done before or would do afterward. Debs had approached the campaign with characteristic optimism, encouraging Socialists to take heart: “The old order of society can survive but little longer.”⁹¹

The Socialists did best in the West and worst in the Southeast. In Oklahoma and Nevada one out of every six voters cast a ballot for Debs. Those two states, plus Montana, Arizona, Washington, California, and Idaho, cast an average 13.6 percent of their vote for the SPA, roughly twice the national rate. The rest of the Socialists’ top quartile of states consisted of Oregon, Florida, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Texas. Arkansas and Louisiana joined Texas in the top half of Socialist states, while the older South—the Carolinas, Virginia, and Georgia—failed to give Debs even 1 percent of the presidential vote. Mississippi and Alabama averaged 3.1 percent; Tennessee and Kentucky averaged 2.0 percent. Inflated by the inclusion of Florida, Texas, and Oklahoma, the South gave Debs

4.2 percent. Without those three states, the SPA averaged 2.7 percent in Dixie. The northeastern states returned an average 3.4 percent Socialist vote, led by Pennsylvania with 6.9 percent. The Midwest averaged 6.5 percent, led by Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, each at over 8 percent. The Central Plains and western states averaged about a tenth of their votes for Debs, led by Nevada.⁹²

Debs and Andrews polled almost identical levels of support in Texas, with less than 400 votes separating their totals (the difference went to Andrews). Reddin Andrews won 25,258 Texas votes in 1912, finishing second in a field of five candidates with 8.4 percent. Most of the SPA gubernatorial vote came from the eastern third of the state; the eighty-three counties selected for this study accounted for 61.0 percent of the Texas Socialist vote. As Green has shown, the Socialists did best in East and North Central Texas. "Deep" East Texas piney wood counties cast above average percentages, because labor strife in the lumber industry had raised class consciousness in that area. The large urban electorates in the booming cotton towns simply swallowed up rural blackland SPA voting, however. Such concentrations of loyal Democratic middle-class voters kept the Socialists' countywide percentages down to around 7 percent on the blackland prairie.⁹³

Over 189,000 voters cast ballots in the gubernatorial race in the eighty-three eastern counties. Democratic incumbent Oscar B. Colquitt easily carried the region with 150,943 votes. Reddin Andrews followed with 15,581 votes, or 8.2 percent. The Socialists profited from the Republican split, beating Republican C. W. Johnson (13,764) and Progressive Edward C. Lasater (7,765) as well as the fifth-place finisher, Prohibitionist Andrew Jackson Houston (1,267), mirroring the same order of finish for the whole state.⁹⁴

Rains County led the state and the eighty-three-county region with a 30 percent Socialist vote. Contiguous to Hunt and Van Zandt, Rains had a history of agrarian agitation, including the founding of the Farmers' Union there a decade earlier. Almost no town-dwelling middle-class vote existed in this small, poor East Texas county. As might be expected, Van Zandt County ranked second with 29.0 percent. Among the seven counties returning a fifth or more of their vote to Reddin Andrews, only one lay outside of East Texas proper. The twenty-six counties giving the Socialists between 10.0 and 19.0 percent of their votes were dominated by East Texas counties; over two thirds came from that region.⁹⁵

In the spring of 1912, U.S. Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey paid a call on Hunt County. A guaranteed crowd-pleaser, Bailey's public appear-

ance offered Greenville's civic leadership an opportunity to boost their city and parade their status for the throng gathered on the courthouse square. A "bevy of beautiful girls dressed in white . . . drawn by a team of four splendid white horses" greeted the senator's train. Representatives of the local elite conducted Bailey's procession to the square, where a crowd of lesser lights heard him denounce Woodrow Wilson's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. For good measure, the Standard Oil Company lawyer blasted the proposed initiative, referendum, and recall as "populistic and altogether socialistic in its objects, purposes and tendency." The county seat gave its conservative champion an enthusiastic ovation. If Hunt County was a hotbed of radical political dissent in 1912, that certainly could not be discerned in its principal town.⁹⁶

On the other hand, Greenville's religious zeal did burn white hot that spring. The Hunt County faithful settled into a round of Anti-Saloon League functions with the local press urging all in favor of "civic righteousness" to attend a prohibition rally featuring two prominent preachers. Soon thereafter spring revivalism swept Greenville churchgoers. Within a few days of each other the ten largest churches reported revivals in progress; for a few intense weeks in April the faithful revived as Greenville, having just survived an outbreak of meningitis, shook off the lethargy of a difficult winter.⁹⁷

The first issue of the *Morning Herald* after revival season carried an exasperated letter from C. E. Obenchain refuting preachers' charges that socialism would destroy family, home, and church. He asserted that anti-Socialists could not argue against the merits of Socialists' economic goals and thus resorted to lying about their moral standing. He declared that such charges were an "absurdity" being used as a "scarecrow" to frighten away the people. But, Obenchain retorted, if "Socialism were really what they charge they wouldn't need scarecrows to frighten the people away from it[,] they would be sufficiently scared to give it a wide berth." Furthermore, he wrote, unlike their critics, democratic Socialists believed that "the people are capable of governing themselves." If the people did choose socialism, he wondered, why would they then "at once proceed to abolish all the sacred institutions they love and cherish and forthwith 'relapse into barbarism'?"⁹⁸

Hunt County Socialists nominated Obenchain to run for Congress in 1912 in the Fourth Congressional District. Obenchain ran a feed store and owned fifteen acres of land outside of Greenville. Counting his horse and wagon, in 1910 his entire wealth of \$605 roughly equaled a year's gross output on a moderate-sized farm. Of course, he stood no

chance against his opponent, Democrat Samuel T. Rayburn. The state representative from Bonham was something of a boy wonder in Texas politics, being elected to the Texas House at twenty-four years of age and now, at the age of thirty, the sitting Speaker of the Texas House, he made his first successful bid for U. S. Congress where he would serve for the coming half-century. The Democrats could not have found a better plain folk symbol than Sam Rayburn with which to vanquish their socialist critics. Rayburn came from tenant parents and was well aware of his good fortune, observing that he "came within a gnat's heel of remaining a tenant farmer" himself. Young Rayburn effortlessly understood the language and culture of the rural poor majority and identified himself with them at every turn. His 1912 triumph could hardly have been greater. He won 89.8 percent of the 15,480 votes cast in the Fourth District of Texas. Obenchain claimed 8.7 percent, and the Republican candidate captured less than two percent.⁹⁹ Obenchain was only one of several local Socialist candidates in the 1912 election.

The devout socialist John A. McCasland did his part to further the Cooperative Commonwealth by running for Hunt County commissioner. McCasland owned and farmed seventy-five acres in the southwest Hunt County community of Union Valley, where he vigorously avoided cotton's clutches by pursuing self-sufficiency with a vengeance. In a telling move, the optimistic and hard-working McCasland literally moved the earth to change the course of a creek that meandered across one of his fields in a manner not to his liking. A respected and active member of his community, he took the lead in matters of local improvement, such as securing rural mail delivery service. His son Charles (b. 1895) recalled that his father "thought wealth should be more evenly distributed" but also "believed in owning land." The land compromise was made for the John McCaslands of rural Texas. He faithfully read *The Appeal to Reason* and worked to promote socialism, bringing a host of Socialist lecturers to the community schoolhouse and making his home their regular lodging and headquarters. As far as McCasland was concerned, Democrats and Republicans were no different; according to his son, the elder McCasland believed both of the established parties were "out to skin you—up one side and down the other."¹⁰⁰

McCasland ran for county commissioner of Hunt County's Second Precinct in 1910 and 1912. In 1910 he came in second, ahead of the Republican candidate, polling 11.5 percent of the votes in the precinct's twenty-one voting boxes, and in 1912 actually gained ground on the Democratic nominee with 14.7 percent. That figure comes nowhere near

depicting the strength of McCasland's support in some rural communities, however. Each of the five county commissioner's precincts originated in Greenville, giving the balance of power to its voters. Greenville voters cast 45.7 percent of the ballots in this race; combined with Caddo Mills, Floyd, and Quinlan, town voters comprised 72.4 percent of Second Precinct voters. True to the historic pattern for radical candidates, McCasland did poorest in these town boxes and best in the countryside. Among the towns, McCasland fared worst in Greenville, with only 6.2 percent, and best in the unusual town of Quinlan, which possessed a voting record consistently at odds with countywide town behavior (as detailed later). There he won 41 out of 190 votes cast, for 21.6 percent. Altogether, McCasland claimed 9.0 percent of the Second Precinct's town ballots.¹⁰¹

The countryside was a different story for McCasland, however. Six of the seven normally dissident voting boxes fell within his commissioner's precinct. Bear Pen, Clinton, South Sabine, Vansickle, and Weiland combined to give the Socialist farmer 37.1 percent of their votes. Two communities went overwhelmingly for McCasland: Whitehead, with 71.4 percent (10 of 14 votes) and Clinton, with 55.2 percent (32 of 55). Overall, the country boxes returned 118 of their 400 votes (29.5 percent) for John McCasland. Rural voters were over three times as likely to vote for McCasland as were town-dwellers. Considering that many votes cast in town polling places actually came from nearby rural dwellers, the unknown actual division between town and country was probably much higher. Interestingly enough, these relatively high percentages were the result of party affiliation and not personal relationships. In the Second Precinct Reddin Andrews received every vote that McCasland received. In other words, rural people were not voting for their neighbor in spite of his socialism but because of it.¹⁰²

Hunt Countians cast 4,089 ballots in the 1912 gubernatorial race.¹⁰³ Democrat Colquitt easily carried the day with 79.0 percent of the vote, while Socialist Andrews came in a distant second with 9.2 percent, trailed by the Republican (5.6 percent), the Progressive (4.9 percent) and the Prohibitionist (1.3 percent) candidates. Andrews came in second because of the rural vote; he secured much lower percentages in the towns, in spite of concerted efforts there.¹⁰⁴

Certainly, the county seat had been exposed to its share of Socialist propaganda. In 1912 the party gathered for a countywide mass meeting on the courthouse square in Greenville. And Greenville was home to congressional candidate Obenchain. But agitation and personalities

proved unable to overcome a basic lack of motivation on the part of the middle class to vote for the SPA. A booming commercial center for the cotton economy, Greenville was dominated by merchants, bankers, physicians, attorneys, real estate speculators, the investors in and managers of cotton-related enterprises (railroads, gins, a compress and warehousing complex), and the more numerous class of semi-prosperous professional and clerical retainers. To be sure, Greenville did contain a small contingent of industrial workers. The compresses, warehouses, railroads, and several lesser industrial enterprises employed many Greenville workers. But the majority of these workers did not vote because of the poll tax and racial intimidation. Middle-class voters dominated the Greenville electorate, then, that gave the Democrats 82.1 percent of its 1912 gubernatorial vote. Here, both the Progressive and the regular Republican finished ahead of Andrews, who picked up only 4.5 percent of the Greenville vote.¹⁰⁵

Hunt County's second principal town, Commerce, had hosted a number of Socialist gatherings beneath the spreading shade trees of its city park. The 1908 August meeting promised rides, "free Ice water," and the oratory of William D. Haywood and Laura B. Payne, "the greatest lady Socialist speaker in the United States." Local resident M. A. Smith provided a constant SPA presence, and by 1912 a number of well-known Socialists had lectured there, including Lena Morrow Lewis, Stanley J. Clark, Tom Hickey, and Colonel Dick Maple.¹⁰⁶ Despite the Socialist presence, Commerce mustered only 21 Socialist votes (6.0 percent) in 1912. The county's other towns followed the same pattern. Caddo Mills, Campbell, Celeste, Floyd, and Lone Oak returned a total of 41 SPA votes out of 893 cast, for a combined 4.6 percent.

The lone exception was the town of Quinlan.¹⁰⁷ Located in the south end of the county, Quinlan perched near the border of Hunt's radical neighbors, Rains and Van Zandt. In 1912 the town boasted nine stores, two gins, and two churches, and the *Greenville Morning Herald* reported that residents "get three square meals a day, have plenty wood and water, and are satisfied with their lot." In 1888, then known as Roberts, the village that would be Quinlan voted 45.1 percent for the Independent Fusion candidate for governor. Returning briefly to the Democratic fold in 1890 to support Hogg, Roberts went overwhelmingly Populist at the first opportunity. In 1892 and 1894 its voters cast well over 60 percent of their votes for Populism. In 1896 Roberts had become Quinlan (so renamed by a railroad president) and had lost some of its radical edge, returning only 45.1 percent for Populism; thereafter, however, Quinlan

voters supported Populists at higher than average rates through that party's decline. Its smaller post-poll tax electorate proved slow to support socialism, but by 1906 Quinlan voters cast SPA ballots at over three times the countywide town rate. Socialist gubernatorial candidates gained steadily in subsequent years.

In 1912 Reddin Andrews claimed 21.0 percent of the Quinlan vote. There was nothing unique within the town of Quinlan itself to explain this. Instead, except for one other rural voting box, there were no rural polling places between Quinlan and the neighboring county lines to the south and west. Quinlan became the polling place for a large rural territory, including McCasland's radicalized community of Union Valley. Quinlan's middle-class voters cast no larger a percentage of their ballots for socialism than other such town voters.¹⁰⁸

In contrast, rural voters in Hunt County supported socialism at two-and-a-half times the rate of town voters. Almost one rural voter out of six cast a ballot for Reddin Andrews and the Socialist Party. While the towns gave Colquitt 81.5 percent, rural voters gave him the lowest rural Democratic majority in Hunt County since the poll tax, 73.8 percent, an eight-point drop from the 1904–10 average. Conversely, the Republicans did as well in the countryside as they had in the towns, with the regular candidate picking up 4.5 percent and the Progressive winning 5.1 percent. The combined Republican-Progressive showing fell in line with the post-poll tax declining trend in rural Republican voting in Hunt County. Rural Hunt Countians averaged 11.3 percent for the Republicans during the period 1904–10. The post-poll tax electorate diminished every year by enough to account for Republican shrinkage in lost black voters alone. Certainly, the shrinkage of the Democratic share of the rural Hunt County vote in 1912 had been presaged by a gradual decline since 1906, the first year of dramatic growth for the SPA. The bulk of Socialist support, then, came from normally Democratic voters, most likely ex-Populists looking for a new plain folk party.¹⁰⁹

The SPA's fortunes grew steadily in rural Hunt County during the period 1904–12. Each year represented an increase over the previous election. Overall, 208 rural-dwelling Hunt Countians cast votes for Andrews in 1912, for a 15.7 percent share of rural votes. In nearly a quarter of the thirty-six Hunt County rural voting boxes, no Socialist votes were reported. Thus, the countywide average fails to show the high level of support existing in the dissenting communities. In the top Socialist quartile precincts, Andrews claimed a third of the votes cast with Whitehead and South Sabine leading the way with Socialist majorities.¹¹⁰

Voters in the seven reliably dissenting communities from the Greenbacker and Populist years cast over one vote out of four for the SPA. A clear division had developed, however. South Sabine, Clinton, and Vansickle each voted over 40.0 percent for socialism, Bear Pen and Weiland recorded over 20.0 percent for socialism, but the formerly radical enclaves of Hackberry and White Rock each returned under 8.0 percent. The Socialist standouts, some back from 1910, included South Sabine, Clinton, Vansickle, Whitehead, Mina, Mexico, Dixon, Weiland, and Donelton, all in the top quartile. No geographical pattern emerged in the 1912 rural Socialist vote in Hunt County. Fifteen of the thirty-two identifiable rural communities existed in the eastern mixed loam half of the county while seventeen fell in the western blackland half of the county. The Socialists' share in the two sets of communities varied almost none. The eastern half of the county returned a 15.7 percent SPA vote compared to 15.4 in the western half.¹¹¹

The blacklanders in the southwestern quarter of Hunt County cast more SPA votes, and a higher proportion of SPA votes, than anywhere else in the county. Voters in Burrow, Cash, Clinton, Mexico, South Sabine, Vansickle, and Whitehead cast 81 of their 230 ballots for Andrews, or 35.2 percent. Of these communities, only Burrow returned no Socialist votes; on the other hand, three of these seven were historically dissident communities supplying higher-than-average support for Greenbackism, Populism, and, now, Socialism. Sixty percent of Whitehead's, 50.0 percent of South Sabine's, 44.4 percent of Vansickle's, and 33.3 percent of Mexico's electorate voted for the Socialist gubernatorial candidate. Voters in these communities were twice as likely to vote for socialism as rural voters elsewhere. The most obvious explanations are the discontent then brewing on the blackland, a history of dissident voting, and the development of indigenous leadership in southwestern Hunt County communities such as Clinton.¹¹²

In 1912 Clinton typified what had become of the yeoman community. Comprised of a handful of landowning families, tenants came and went in their midst, with increasing social distance. Containing a Baptist and a Methodist church, a railroad station, two stores, and a gin, Clinton also served as polling place for the surrounding community of farmers.¹¹³

The people of greater Clinton made up a remarkably homogeneous whole. Among the 289 potential voters, 281 (97.2 percent) were white and eight were black (2.4 percent). These dissident voters were overwhelmingly southern-born. Of the 289 voting-age males, 282 (97.6 percent) were born in the South; only seven Clintonians (2.4 percent) were born

in northern states. The homogeneity ran even deeper. Of the southern-born, 277 had parents who were also southern-born. There were no foreign-born residents of Clinton and only two with a foreign-born parent. The only variety to manifest itself was in the states in which Clintonians were born, serving also to explain previously heightened levels of Republican voting. The single state eclipsing all others in place of birth was Tennessee (stronghold of Republican mountain whites), claiming 82 of the 289 voting-age males. Texas ran a close second with 81. By region, 44.6 percent were born in the Upper South, 28.0 percent were born in Texas, and 24.9 percent were born in the Lower South. It is hard to imagine a turn-of-the-century community more dominated by southern plain folk than Socialistically inclined Clinton.¹¹⁴

Some 306 households comprised greater Clinton. It had a non-farm voting-age male population of 13 people, only 6 qualifying as middle-class. The balance consisted of 275 farm families. Fifty-nine owned their own land, making a community tenancy rate of 78.5 percent.¹¹⁵

For the sons and daughters of landowners, Clinton provided a close-knit and supportive environment. The community was dominated by small holdings; the largest landowner possessed 200 acres. Lorraine Buchanan Jordan (b. 1902) believed that during her childhood there, the majority of Clinton's families owned their own land. In her view, tenants comprised only a handful of young men from landowning families awaiting their inheritances. Social invisibility marked the migratory sharecroppers pushed up and down the blackland prairie by hard times, bad credit, and conflicts with landlords. (Jordan lacked an awareness of tenants despite her sympathy and identification with poor people and African Americans.)¹¹⁶

In any case, even the most complacent must have reacted strongly one way or the other to Clinton's 1912 election results. Seventy-one Clintonians cast ballots in the 1912 Texas governor's race; thirty-two of them voted for Reddin Andrews and the Socialist Party of America. A Socialist local had been first organized in Clinton in 1904 or 1905. Over the years Clinton's yeomanry had time to examine the claim of the Texas Socialist Party to represent their interests. More importantly, they had face-to-face Socialists, local people whom they knew and whose characters they could judge, to talk to about the goals and policies of the Socialist Party. One of those yeomen was W. J. Glasscock, owner of 42 acres, a two-mule team, four cows, four hogs, and a wagon with the cumulative tax value of \$1,245. He was one of them, solidly in the ranks of the respectable but rural poor majority. In 1911 Glasscock boasted of

Clinton that "ninety-five percent there are now comrades." Confident of Clinton, Glasscock planned his next foray into the county seat itself.¹¹⁷

The Socialist vote in Greenville (4.5 percent) demonstrates, however, the limited effect of local agitation. Socialists had little luck with the town-dwelling middle class. Thus, the Socialist vote in Clinton, as in other such rural communities, was primarily a product of plain-folk rejection of the shape of the twentieth-century American economy.¹¹⁸

After 1912 the Socialist Party fell into eclipse in Texas. As Green has shown, socialism's decline in the Southwest resulted in part from World War I-era government repression. The effective end of the Texas Socialist Party arrived quickly, beginning in May 1917 when Texas Rangers detained Hickey for questioning during the hysteria accompanying America's entry into World War I. Federal prosecutors convened a grand jury in Abilene and sought to link Hickey to the Farmers' and Laborers' Protective Association, whose leadership was charged with subversion and draft resistance. The grand jury declined to indict Hickey, but, by then, it was too late to save the *Rebel*. In June U.S. Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson effectively shut down the *Rebel* and other radical newspapers across the country by denying their access to second-class postage rates. In July, Hickey and other socialist editors traveled to Washington to appeal the decision, and although represented by, in Hickey's estimation, "the greatest legal minds in the radical movement" (including Morris Hillquit and Clarence Darrow), the Wilson administration did not relent. The *Rebel* never recovered; Hickey himself resurfaced as an organizer for the Nonpartisan League (a forerunner of Minnesota's Democratic Farmer-Labor Party) and struggled to maintain a presence in Texas journalism until his death in 1925.¹¹⁹ For six heady years, however, the *Rebel* continuously focused plain folk attention on economic and political issues, chief among them ownership of land.

In Texas, especially, socialism's appeal also declined because of the rise of James E. "Farmer Jim" Ferguson. A banker-landlord and political unknown, in 1914 Ferguson seemed to come out of nowhere in the Democratic gubernatorial primary.¹²⁰ He neutralized the liquor question by disingenuously promising to veto both sides' legislation (thus effectively promising to protect the liquor interests) while focusing the balance of his campaign on the hard conditions for tenant families. Seizing upon the worst abuses of the share renting system, Ferguson promised to make tenancy more humane by mandating in law the customary shares of thirds and fourths for share tenants or halves for sharecroppers, while banning cash bonuses or "add-ons." Ferguson proclaimed, "For

fifty years the good old rule of cropping on the third and fourth and on the halves has been the custom in Texas.” He believed that state regulations could provide “the immediate relief” that “the farmer needs.” Ferguson claimed that his remedies would not only “prevent oppression” of tenants by landlords but would indirectly fulfill the agrarian dream of wiping out the profitability of concentrated land-holdings. Under Ferguson’s rent control law, the candidate claimed, there would be “no incentive to own lands except for home occupation.”¹²¹

According to Ferguson, most farmer-landlords had no objection to his proposals, because they did not engage in the targeted exploitative practices. Ferguson singled out the absentee-landlord as main culprit. Such people should be forewarned that if they continued their abuses under the banner of property rights, “that right may be taken away from” them by a government whose power “rests on the consent of the governed.” More pointedly, Ferguson told the Democrats, “take away today the abuses of the present rent system and the Socialist would not have a leg to stand on.” As the anti-prohibition “wet” forces (and their money) and the Texas Farmers’ Union president and past president lined up behind Ferguson, a battle within the Democratic Party began.¹²²

Ferguson’s candidacy in the primary upset the plans of the Democratic Party’s progressive leadership. Their compromise candidate in 1914 was Houston corporate attorney and lobbyist Thomas H. Ball, who had captured both the progressives and the prohibitionists despite his own hazy credentials as either a prohibitionist or progressive. Ball was backed by an odd assortment of respected if conflicting Democrats: the prohibitionist leadership (J. B. Gambrell, George C. Rankin, and J. B. Cranfill); anti-prohibitionist conservative Joseph W. Bailey; progressives Woodrow Wilson and Albert S. Burleson; and even the lion of the party, William Jennings Bryan. Ball’s qualification as reformer hinged mainly upon his vocal support of the Anti-Saloon League. As the chosen candidate of the reform Democrats, however, Ball could count upon heavy majorities from the pious, dry, middle-class Protestant towns north of the German counties and, his supporters hoped, the equally pious, Protestant (if not quite as dry) rural voters in the same region. Ferguson’s introduction of the “tenant plank” suddenly recast the primary. The “progressive” Ball was faced with a formidable opponent in Ferguson. “Farmer Jim” used his considerable stump-speaking skills to portray Ball as a man of the corporations, while presenting himself as a man of the people, the new Jim Hogg.¹²³

Ball’s supporters tried to make prohibition the campaign’s single is-

sue. Greenville's Judge E. D. Thompson conceded that while "the tenant problem" and "the land question" were important, they simply were not of the same magnitude as prohibition. The Greenville Democratic machine backed the dry candidate and attempted to intimidate potential Ferguson voters. The Hunt County Democratic Party chairman, real estate entrepreneur Will N. Harrison, warned non-Democrats to stay away from the July primary, declaring that "we understand that quite a number of Republicans and Socialists are taking considerable interest in this primary and are intending to vote in it." Harrison complained that he had come under fire for his announcement and pled for understanding and cooperation in one of the town's newspapers. Harrison averred that while he personally had Socialist friends, he could not welcome even them into the primary. Backed by Texas Attorney General (and former Greenville lawyer) Ben F. Looney, Harrison warned that potential voters would have to swear that they had voted for Woodrow Wilson in 1912 in order to participate in the 1914 primary. Hunt County Democrats were determined to bar "men who have been identified in previous elections with other parties." Clearly, Greenville's Democratic leadership feared the rural poor majority would choose Ferguson over Ball. They were right.¹²⁴

North Texas proved Ball's stronghold. His campaign had strategically chosen Hunt County for his official announcement speech because Greenville was one of the prosperous cotton towns Ball had to carry in order to win. Hunt and four contiguous counties made up five of Ball's top eight counties statewide. But Ball carried Hunt County in 1914 on the strength of the town vote, receiving a third of his vote in Greenville alone. Together, the towns delivered three-quarters of Ball's entire Hunt County vote. In contrast, Ball carried only thirteen of the thirty-five rural boxes. Ferguson claimed 71.1 percent of Clinton's Democratic primary votes, and in the seven reliable dissenting precincts Ferguson swamped Ball with 57.8 percent of the vote. It would appear that Chairman Harrison's fears were well-founded. In the whole of the Hunt County countryside rural voters cast 53.7 percent of their primary ballots for the candidate promising tenant relief through rent controls.¹²⁵

Unfortunately for Ball, most Texas counties had no towns large enough to supply a Greenville-sized preponderance of the vote. Texas "Democrats" easily nominated Ferguson in 1914, in the largest primary turn-out in the state's history up to that time.¹²⁶ Ferguson, of course, triumphed over his November opponents, including Socialist E. O. Meitzen.

Socialists blasted Ferguson, and Hickey lamented that the SPA had “unwillingly assisted” in Ferguson’s nomination by making tenancy a public issue. Furthermore, that year Texas Socialists adopted two resolutions that signaled their own weaknesses, both practical and ideological. In a purely pragmatic sense, their anti-war statement would eventually make them vulnerable to charges of disloyalty during World War I. Their other pronouncement reverberated with its fundamental contradiction of socialist ideology when it warned that Ferguson’s reforms would “place all tenants as wage laborers in which the white tenants would have to compete with negro and Mexican laborers.” On the war issue, Texas Socialists courageously embraced an unpopular tenet of their international ideology; on race, they betrayed a fundamental principle of that same ideology. That Socialist leaders felt it safer to embrace pacifism than racial equality suggests something of the power of white supremacy in early-twentieth-century Texas. Further, this demonstrated, at best, a failure of nerve within the leadership and the fatal weakness at the core of the white poor majority’s sense of community.¹²⁷

In 1914 the Socialists nominated for governor E. R. Meitzen, who did not get as many votes as Andrews had in 1912. This disappointed optimists who had pointed to the swelling numbers in the 1912 second-place finish. Still, Meitzen came in second, and his 24,977 votes even represented a relative increase in share of the total vote. In Hunt County the Socialists held their ground, but only tiny Mexico and reliable Clinton returned Socialist majorities. Realistic observers knew that the Ferguson phenomenon had undercut the Socialist Party’s rapid growth. Ferguson was a Democrat. On the stump he could invoke his hallowed partisan pedigree, calling forth such formidable campaigners as Jefferson and Hogg from the grave. This, combined with his country style and the “tenant plank,” bought him credibility with the plain folk. Unlike the Socialists, who labored under the odium of representing a new party vulnerable to charges of atheism and racial equality, a good Democrat like Ferguson came to the rural poor majority in the name of their Democratic-Confederate ancestors, proclaiming himself one of them. No other Democratic gubernatorial candidate had even admitted that the land-owning yeoman majority was no more and that the landless majority were their heirs. Instead of hearing themselves portrayed as shiftless and lazy, in Ferguson they heard a Democrat who affirmed them and recognized their plight. He was simply too much to resist.¹²⁸

Ferguson’s proposed rent control met with widespread support in the countryside, including Hunt County. Texas State Farmers’ Union presi-

dent W. D. Lewis endorsed the proposals in the Hunt County press, seeking to define the choices as being between socialism on the one hand and rent control on the other. Farmers, "like any other class of people," had their share of the "weak and incapable," but the Farmers' Union had no sympathy for them or their agenda and opposed legislation "that involve[d] the entire structure of society in order to benefit the incompetent." The Union, however, did support state intervention to enforce customary thirds and fourths share renting.¹²⁹

Ferguson made good on his promise to enact a rent control law. The governor called on the legislature for comprehensive reform limiting landlords to collecting the customary shares of one-third of the grain and one-fourth of the cotton from tenants owning their own teams and tools and one-half of the grain and cotton from sharecroppers who did not. He warned that Texas tenants were angry enough to attack property rights across the board if limited redress were not forthcoming. Ferguson told the legislature that Texas tenants lived in much the same misery as the "peons" of Mexico with one difference: Mexico's discontented peasantry "is now trying to destroy the government that permits such a condition to exist, and has appealed to force; while the tenant farmer of Texas is still loyal to his government and has appealed to reason." His proposal assessed penalties of double damages for tenants who successfully sued landlords for an infraction. The measure passed the House by a vote of 100 to 24 and the Senate by 23 to 4. Hunt County's representatives split, with absentee-landlord Joseph F. Nichols voting for the law. Even at the moment of passage, Rains County State Representative W. C. Middleton declared the rent control law to be not "worth the paper it is written on."¹³⁰ He was right.

By placing the burden of enforcement on tenants, the law effectively ensured that no real change would occur. The chances of a tenant having the resources to challenge a landlord in a local court were virtually nil. The law was "seldom enforced," and soon Ferguson's demagoguery, corruption, and political bankruptcy resulted in his impeachment and removal from office. In 1921 the Texas Supreme Court put the rent control law out of its misery, finding it unconstitutional.¹³¹

The Texas Socialist Party seemed to comprehend that the very people who voted Socialist did not in fact reject the notion of smallholders' private property. They did not want to be government renters; they wanted a place of their own. Whether or not this fit into a theoretically correct Marxist paradigm was of absolutely no interest to the people themselves. Indeed, they were fierce critics of capitalism, but theory

was not their concern. They were motivated by the desire to assume a position of respected independence within a family-centered, highly interdependent community. They had nothing against making a little money, but they deeply resented money's all-powerful status in their new world. They respected family name, reputation, religion, and work; they practiced reciprocity, egalitarianism, neighborliness, and bigotry; they tended toward moralistic judgments. They knew that the system denied them a fighting chance at land ownership and that the independence they sought could not be had by working somebody else's land. And a significant minority among them (one out of six rural Hunt County voters in 1912) proved willing to take the bold step of registering their disaffection for capitalism by voting for Eugene V. Debs, Reddin Andrews, and agrarian socialism.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The rural community in the eastern third of Texas underwent a fundamental transformation between 1870 and 1910. Immigrants from the rest of the South dramatically increased the population. Farm values tripled, and in the cotton counties they nearly quadrupled. In Hunt County, 1910 farm values were six times their 1870 level, even as the average farm size shrank from 157 to 78 acres. Tenancy skyrocketed everywhere but especially in the cotton counties; by 1910 over two-thirds of all Hunt County farmers were tenants. The farmers' chances of owning land narrowed, manifested in the rising percentage of mature farmers still sharecropping. Tenants and other rural poor people also lost the use of the free range in most places, and the incidence of livestock per farm family plummeted; the per-farm number of subsistence animals on Hunt County farms halved. Livestock's relative place among all farm family assets fell from one third to less than a tenth. While small owner-operators struggled to maintain a compromise between subsistence and commercial production, tenants were compelled to plant so much of their farms in cotton that self-sufficiency became a dim memory. Absolute poverty rates in Hunt County increased six times. The richest 30 percent increased their share of the wealth, while the poor majority, the 70 percent remaining, lost ground.

Yet, even as its economic foundation collapsed, the plain folk community stubbornly held to a set of values that emphasized family, work,

and community interdependence. The struggle to wrest a living from the physical environment continued to dominate these people's lives as nothing else could. Neighborly cooperation was their ideal; while the ideal was probably rarely attained, the yeomanry commonly practiced a matter-of-fact communitarianism evidenced in tending the sick and joining in cooperative seasonal work. Most rural people had to work, and small farm owners and tenants spent similar amounts of time behind the plow. Farm women toiled in meal preparation and homemaking in the most literal and laborious sense, and most spent a good portion of their time and energy in the fields. In most respects, tenants and owners shared a common rural culture arising from three centuries of social exchange between the plain folk, slaves, freedmen, and poorer whites of the American South. There were few profound divisions among this people in the fundamentals of life: marriage and family customs, work, faith, food, celebrations, and language. In any event, among working farmers, both owners' and tenants' lives were dominated by the same rain or lack thereof, temperature, soil, seasonal endeavors, interest rates, and cotton market prices. This overwhelming, undeniable, omnipresent, physical fact of undifferentiated work and worry bound small farm owner and tenant neighbors together on an emotional and practical level.

The changing economy placed great strain on the culture of mutuality, however. Plain folk community cohesiveness already contained a profound, and ultimately fatal, fissure in white supremacy. Ironically, racism may have been only the most striking component of an otherwise cohesive value system based on blood connections. Supportive and sustaining to insiders, such networks could be cold indeed, even brutally violent, to outsiders or vulnerable minority groups. Increasing tenancy rates further weakened the rural community's cohesiveness, taking away independence of action, weakening family bonds by requiring greater geographical mobility, and producing a new anti-egalitarian class of absentee-landlords. By the turn of the century, rural dwellers lived in varying degrees of community, defined either by their physical location or social status, which ran from cohesive high-ownership kinfolk communities to the most atomized pseudo-communities of mobile tenants.

A significant minority of rural poor people did not lie down for what they saw as an economic assault upon their community. Their habit of seeing the world in a moral light caused them to subject the new economy to a searching critique, as manifested in the debate over "the land question." Through its indigenous leadership of preachers, teachers, and

newspapermen, this community sought to work out the morally correct basis for ownership during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The most traditional among them argued that those who profited by owning land upon which others were forced to labor indeed violated their moral precepts. A minority among them even came to argue that "use and occupancy" should be the legally enforced standard for land ownership.

Texas farmers had long given more support than town-dwellers to structural critiques of the rapidly changing post-Civil War economy. Through heightened levels of support for currency inflation, railroad regulation, maintenance of the free range, Populism's radical remedies, and, finally, agrarian socialism, the Texas plain folk community contained a consistently dissenting minority, occasionally swelling to a majority, fighting a dogged but doomed rearguard action against dependence and inequality.

When the crowded land market denied the rural common people a realistic chance at ownership, there was no new place to run to, no frontier into which they could escape.¹ It was a brand-new experience for their culture, this entrapment. Theirs was the first generation where the angriest and ablest were unable to simply pull up stakes and head off into the vast West. This helps to explain the apparently incongruous phenomenon of Socialist voting. Unable to replicate the semi-egalitarian yeoman community by moving on, as had been their wont in generations past, this time they were stuck and they knew it. Unable to escape from bought-up country for a cheap frontier, they instead attempted to use the political system to reinstate a semblance of the plain folk community in the current setting. This impulse was not without internal tensions. The most radical among them sought a redistribution of ownership of land into the hands of the rural poor majority. They were even willing to use the coercive power of government to achieve this goal. Far from being against the individual ownership of land, they yearned for its more widespread occurrence. Agrarian socialism also sought to solve the town-country social conflict, as far as political ideology could, by seeking a proletarian-farmer alliance. But the poor people in the countryside were primarily agrarian, culturally in harmony with Populism. For them, socialism echoed the Populist battle-cry for the post-Populist, post-ownership generation. Populism had been the prescient warning bell of anti-monopolist landowners; socialism spoke to their landless children a decade and a half later. Populism had not dealt adequately with where the plain folk were headed—tenancy; socialism moved the "land ques-

tion" to the front of the debate in Texas, but it arrived too late and was too far from mainstream politics.

Socialist voters were indeed a small minority of all voters in the general election and an even smaller number when measured against participation in the Democratic primaries. Clearly, most of the plain folk either failed to develop, or rejected, class consciousness in a systematic, political way. While the rural poor majority sometimes evinced something akin to class consciousness, that something was an amorphous resentment, not economically analytical as the term "class consciousness" implies. Only a minority engaged in voting behavior suggestive of class consciousness. Given the smallness of the SPA vote on the state and county level, what is its significance? First, we must eliminate townspeople from our accounting of the rural SPA vote. The SPA got only 8.6 percent of the vote in Hunt County in 1912, but it received roughly twice that level of support from those rural voters still willing to pay to vote. What does 16 percent of the country electorate mean? Those one out of six who cast ballots for socialism were more like their Democratic or non-voting fellows than they were different. The Socialists appealed to a common cultural longing for an egalitarian community, a longing that resided even in those who did not respond to Socialist appeals. It was asking a lot of such voters to abandon the party of their fathers and support a new political movement, one under attack from credible authority figures as atheistic, foreign, hostile to family and home, and, above all, insufficiently white supremacist. Pre-poll tax support for the Populist Party in Texas more nearly reflects the true level of longing for the institutionalization of the egalitarian community.

This was borne out in 1914, when a Democratic politician finally paid attention to tenants' troubles. More Texans voted in the 1914 primary than had in any primary or general election since 1900, and more voters voted for Jim Ferguson than had voted for any candidate in a general or primary election since the days before the poll tax. In fact, the total vote in the Democratic primary of 1914 represented the post-poll tax high-water mark for a generation. In spite of low SPA vote totals, its 16 percent in the 1912 Hunt County countryside (a county giving only mediocre overall support to socialism) is suggestive that, had it not been for the poll tax and the cultural/racial appeal of the Democrats, the Socialist vote would have been much higher. The Socialists' economic message obviously resonated deeply for some within the rural community. Those who voted for the party simply responded more strongly to an impulse that may have been present in the majority. Whatever they thought of

the Socialist Party (too atheistic, too racially egalitarian, too new), its essential agrarian message of a producers' community of equals mirrored impulses deep in their culture.

While the Texas Populists had been poised on the verge of a radical critique of capitalism in the 1890s, the changing economy and political climate soon insured that any successor group would face longer odds. Back during the Populist heyday, there had existed a significant constituency or "interest" worth courting by those who sought power (or, said differently, this interest was powerful and dynamic enough itself to produce, nurture, and support its own indigenous leadership). As the once-independent countryside became increasingly dependent, politically that constituency disappeared. As a matter of practical politics, the old yeomanry (white) and the new yeomanry (black) politically ceased to exist. As a political force, the African American freeholder or tenant was snuffed out by the poll tax or intimidation or both, while independent landowning whites ceased being the majority. The poorest whites were eliminated from the political equation by the same poll tax that eliminated black voting. Finally, under pressure from a quickly changing and threatening economy, the ex-yeomanry contributed to its own political demise by erecting new social barriers between its own economic subclasses (based on perceptions of worthiness that the new economy guaranteed would apply to fewer each year) and by denying its own identity of interest with the rural African American community.

Once the economy settled into a structure wherein the majority's economic interests could no longer be effectively represented by the current political leadership, those leaders began to base appeals on cultural themes that embodied interclass consensus. In Texas these included conventional piety (prohibition) and, especially, white supremacy. In fact, both were presented as cures for most of society's ills. Much of this grew out of the democratic style of American politics in general but more specifically southern and Texas democracy. The people expected candidates to identify with the common lot, but since the common lot now suffered from losses inflicted by the economic system to which most candidates owed fealty, discussion of truly relevant economic issues no longer served politicians well. Notwithstanding the inability of the established political elite to raise economic issues, Socialist candidates could and did. The Texas Socialists who took up this challenge would be battled by the Democratic leadership using the powerful cultural themes of religion and race. Politicians across the South successfully used this general approach against challenges to what some have called

Democratic “hegemony.” Almost everywhere it paid immediate dividends. Democratic success, as far as white supremacy is concerned, was ensured by the racism of the white majority. Racism became, perhaps, a comforting emotional buoy in a troubled sea of economic uncertainty.

The rural Socialist vote is important because it stands for something else. It embodied the last searching critique of American capitalism produced and embraced by an element within the poor majority seeking to maintain a form of equality that even then barely existed in the countryside, an equality based on a shared way of life, work, and (until the recent past) near equality in opportunity for ownership of some amount of land.

This tradition did not comprise perfect equality either of opportunity or condition, even among whites. And it was largely unavailable to blacks. Nevertheless, in the countryside this notion of rough equality among whites persisted in Texas, however unevenly, because of the persistence of land ownership as a majority experience into the early twentieth century. This point cannot be over-emphasized. For in the semi-subsistence, semi-commercial world of John McCasland, land ownership still quite literally meant “ownership of the means of production.” The common experiences of life and work made small farm owners and tenants in the countryside much alike in many ways. Ownership of land was an absolute common denominator, whether it was J. A. Glasscock’s forty Clinton acres or John McCasland’s seventy-five Union Valley acres. Being on the land as a tenant, however, was a poor substitute for owning land. Yet early-twentieth-century rural Texans struggled to retain vestiges of egalitarianism, even in the face of the final triumph of tenancy. In the end, the pressures were simply too great. Some accommodation had to be reached with the undeniable chasm growing between land-owners and tenants in the countryside. Country owners, following the lead of absentee-landlords, could not help but develop a rationale to justify the system under which only a minority of the plain folk prospered. Tenants, ironically their cultural brethren, became increasingly “lazy,” “ignorant,” “poor managers,” and generally improvident. This helped owners accept and make sense of an increasingly competitive and risky commercial marketplace.

Inequality and social disconnectedness were harder to justify in the physically close-knit rural community. Its residents knew that the sun shone on both the worthy and the unworthy and that sometimes the hardest-working members of their community suffered irreversible losses through happenstance and misfortune. That is why, traditionally,

they had greeted individual disaster with a communitarian response. But these values and practices were not compatible with the competitive structure of the modern American marketplace and its culture of individualism. Just as the yeomanry's old mutuality had resulted in part from its economic foundation of widespread property ownership, so too would the new economic reality—a relatively vacant countryside exploited by a few over-extended, credit-dependent, intensely capitalized, exclusively commercial farmers—shape a redefinition of community. The new community would be even narrower in its limits and weaker in its attachments than the flawed but interdependent plain folk community that preceded it.

APPENDIX A

TABLES FOR CHAPTER 2

TABLE 2.1. *Regional Population*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	631,093	1,177,617	1,586,836	2,138,517	2,407,900
E. Texas	280,584	437,652	554,112	761,872	901,353
C. Texas	350,509	739,965	1,032,724	1,376,645	1,506,547
Hunt County	10,291	17,230	31,870	47,285	48,116

Source: All population and agricultural data in the chapter 2 tables are from the Ninth through Thirteenth U.S. Censuses.

TABLE 2.2. *Rates of Population Growth by Race and Subregion, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
REGION (83 counties)					
Total Pop.	————	+86.6%	+34.7%	+34.8%	+12.6%
Whites	————	+106.5%	+38.7%	+37.1%	+12.8%
Blacks	————	+53.1%	+26.2%	+25.9%	+11.8%
EAST TEXAS (40 counties)					
Total Pop.	————	+55.9%	+26.6%	+37.5%	+18.3%
Whites	————	+57.7%	+30.7%	+43.0%	+21.0%
Blacks	————	+53.3%	+19.6%	+27.3%	+12.5%
CENTRAL TEXAS (43 counties)					
Total Pop.	————	+111.1%	+39.6%	+33.3%	+9.4%
Whites	————	+141.8%	+42.4%	+34.5%	+9.0%
Blacks	————	+52.9%	+33.1%	+24.6%	+11.0%

TABLE 2.3. *Percent Black Populations: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	33.0%	26.9%	25.6%	25.6%	25.4%
E. Texas	37.9%	34.4%	33.7%	32.2%	31.1%
C. Texas	29.1%	20.0%	20.6%	19.4%	20.1%
Hunt County	10.5%	7.0%	9.3%	9.2%	9.5%

TABLE 2.4. *Value of Farms (Land and Buildings): County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	\$918.45	\$929.31	\$1537.94	\$1479.88	\$2919.63
E. Texas	\$761.63	\$659.23	\$818.14	\$700.85	\$1349.49
C. Texas	\$1027.52	\$1080.75	\$1898.80	\$1959.00	\$3988.51
Hunt County	\$520.44	\$864.04	\$1680.09	\$1725.87	\$3178.95

TABLE 2.5. *Farm Size in Acres: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	317.3	161.7	138.9	110.2	104.2
E. Texas	385.7	176.7	140.1	101.0	93.0
C. Texas	261.0	147.7	137.7	118.7	119.7
Hunt County	157.1	122.0	96.1	77.3	78.2

TABLE 2.6. *Per Acre Farm Value (Land and Buildings): County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	\$2.89	\$5.75	\$11.07	\$13.43	\$28.02
E. Texas	\$1.97	\$3.73	\$5.84	\$6.49	\$14.50
C. Texas	\$3.94	\$7.32	\$13.79	\$16.50	\$33.32
Hunt County	\$3.31	\$7.08	\$17.48	\$22.33	\$40.65

TABLE 2.7. *Percent Farm Acreage Improved (Cleared, Plowed, and/or Fenced): County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	18.3%	35.8%	49.2%	47.1%	49.7%
E. Texas	16.6%	24.5%	35.2%	42.0%	44.7%
C. Texas	19.8%	43.4%	62.2%	51.9%	54.2%
Hunt County	17.4%	42.9%	69.2%	66.7%	74.0%

TABLE 2.8. *Improved Farm Land in Cotton: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	—	25.6%	29.0%	38.0%	39.6%
E. Texas	—	32.0%	32.1%	33.3%	31.8%
C. Texas	—	23.2%	26.1%	42.2%	46.7%
Hunt County	—	19.0%	30.7%	43.2%	55.4%

TABLE 2.9. *All Farm Land in Cotton: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	—	9.2%	13.9%	18.4%	20.1%
E. Texas	—	7.8%	11.8%	14.8%	14.5%
C. Texas	—	10.1%	15.9%	21.7%	25.2%
Hunt County	—	8.2%	21.2%	28.8%	41.0%

TABLE 2.10. *Hogs per Farm: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	22.8	13.8	12.0	8.5	8.0
E. Texas	24.6	19.2	16.0	9.9	11.5
C. Texas	21.4	8.7	8.3	7.2	4.8
Hunt County	15.6	14.6	6.9	6.8	3.3

TABLE 2.11. *Bushels of Sweet Potatoes per Farm: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	37.8	11.2	31.2	12.4	12.0
E. Texas	51.5	18.8	43.3	18.5	22.7
C. Texas	26.5	4.0	19.1	6.7	3.4
Hunt County	21.0	4.0	19.3	3.7	1.1

TABLE 2.12. *Milk Cows per Farm: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	6.7	3.2	—	2.2	2.4
E. Texas	6.0	2.9	—	2.1	2.4
C. Texas	7.3	3.5	—	2.3	2.3
Hunt County	6.4	2.8	—	1.9	1.4

TABLE 2.13. *Bales of Cotton per Person: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	0.46	0.59	0.71	0.91	0.71
E. Texas	0.47	0.61	0.47	0.66	0.49
C. Texas	0.45	0.57	0.93	1.13	0.91
Hunt County	0.41	0.63	0.57	1.10	1.37

TABLE 2.14. *Number of Farms: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	701	1,695	2,086	3,206	3,351
E. Texas	636	1,264	1,445	2,534	2,816
C. Texas	755	2,096	2,682	3,832	3,848
Hunt County	1,499	2,599	3,835	5,946	5,944

TABLE 2.15. *Bales of Cotton per Farm: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	6.1	4.8	6.3	6.9	5.5
E. Texas	6.5	4.9	4.7	4.7	3.4
C. Texas	5.7	4.7	7.8	8.9	7.4
Hunt County	2.8	4.2	4.7	8.7	11.1

TABLE 2.16. *Hunt County and Cotton*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Farms	1,499	2,599	3,835	5,946	5,944
Total bales	4,197	10,916	18,025	51,730	65,978
Bales per farm	2.8	4.2	4.7	8.7	11.1

TABLE 2.17. *Tenancy: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	NO. OF COUNTIES
Texas	—	37.6%	41.9%	49.7%	52.6%	254
Region	—	37.4%	42.1%	50.1%	52.2%	83
E. Texas	—	35.4%	35.1%	44.2%	46.2%	40
C. Texas	—	39.2%	48.1%	55.6%	57.8%	43
Hunt County	—	31.4%	48.0%	58.7%	67.5%	1

TABLE 2.18. *Percentage of All Farmers Share Renting/Cropping: County Averages*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Region	—	32.5%	33.5%	43.1%	43.5%
E. Texas	—	29.0%	28.5%	38.6%	38.3%
C. Texas	—	31.9%	37.9%	47.4%	48.3%
Hunt County	—	28.4%	42.4%	54.5%	65.2%

TABLE 2.19. *Hogs per Farm and Bushels of Sweet Potatoes per Farm in Region, 1910*

HOGS	BUSHELs	NO. OF COUNTIES ^a
0–3.9	3.8	26
4.0–5.9	6.2	23
6.0 and up	25.9	25

r = .9561 R² = .91

^aN = 74; data for some variables were missing for some counties.

TABLE 2.20. *Regional Tenancy Rate by Percent of Improved Farm Land Planted in Cotton, 1910*

TENANCY	IMPROVED LAND IN COTTON	NO. OF COUNTIES ^a
0-39%	12.4%	10
40-49%	34.6%	21
50-59%	38.3%	24
60-70%	51.0%	22

$r = .8073$ $R^2 = .65$

^aN = 77; data for some variables were missing for some counties.

TABLE 2.21. *Tenancy Rate by Cotton Bales per Farm: County Averages, 1910*

TENANCY	BALES PER FARM	NO. OF COUNTIES ^a
0-39%	1.2	10
40-49%	3.1	21
50-59%	4.7	24
60-70%	9.6	22

$r = .7754$ $R^2 = .60$

^aN = 77; data for some variables were missing for some counties.

TABLE 2.22. *Subsistence Variables vs. Cotton Variables for Entire Region, 1910 (coefficient of correlation)*

	BUSHEL OF SWEET POTATOES PER FARM	HOGS PER FARM	MILK COWS PER FARM
Percentage of Land in Cotton	-.4813	-.4445	-.7257
Bales per Farm	-.5293	-.4658	-.4792
Tenancy	-.7635	-.6740	-.6143

TABLE 2.23. *Milk Cows per Farm by Percent of Farmers Share Renting or Cropping: County Average, 1910*

MILK COWS	SHARE RENTERS OR CROPPERS	NO. OF COUNTIES
0-1.9	53.4%	27
2.0-2.9	42.7%	43
3.0 and up	25.5%	13

$r = .7148$ $R^2 = .51$

TABLE 2.24. *Tenancy by Percent of Improved Land in Sweet Potatoes: County Averages*

TENANCY	PERCENT IN SWEET POTATOES	NO. OF COUNTIES ^a
0-39%	2.87%	8
40-49%	.10%	19
50-59%	.08%	23
60-70%	.00%	22

$r = .7243$ $R^2 = .52$

^aN = 72; data for some variables were missing for some counties.

TABLE 2.25. *Tenancy by Bushels of Sweet Potatoes per Farm: County Averages*

TENANCY	BUSHELs	NO. OF COUNTIES ^a
0-39%	55.5	9
40-49%	9.2	19
50-59%	6.3	24
60-70%	3.0	22

$r = -.7635$ $R^2 = .58$

^aN = 74; data for some variables were missing for some counties.

APPENDIX B

TABLES FOR CHAPTER 3

TABLE 3.1. *Shares of Household Wealth Owned by Each Tenth of the Population: Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Wealthiest 10%	47.4%	61.6%	57.7%	54.7%	52.2%
10%	16.4%	15.6%	16.9%	17.3%	18.4%
10%	11.0%	8.8%	10.7%	11.1%	12.1%
10%	8.2%	5.7%	6.8%	7.5%	7.4%
10%	5.9%	3.4%	3.9%	4.7%	4.7%
10%	4.3%	2.4%	2.1%	2.3%	2.5%
10%	3.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.3%	1.5%
10%	1.9%	.6%	.5%	.7%	.9%
10%	1.2%	.3%	.1%	.2%	.2%
Poorest 10%	.5%	.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%

Source: All of the information on personal and real household wealth in Hunt County, Texas, in the chapter 3 tables was obtained from systematic random samples (see appendix C for discussion of method) taken from the Hunt County Tax Rolls for 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910.

TABLE 3.2. *Increases or Decreases in Shares of Household Wealth:
Hunt County, 1870–1910*

Wealthiest 10% = +10.1%
10% = +12.2%
10% = +10.0%
10% = –9.8%
10% = –20.3%
10% = –41.9%
10% = –53.1%
10% = –52.6%
10% = –83.3%
Poorest 10% = –100.0%

TABLE 3.3. *Share of the Wealth Owned by Cumulative Percentages of the Population:
Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1910	% NET INCREASE OR DECREASE
Wealthiest 10%	47.4%	52.2%	+10.1%
Wealthiest 20%	63.8%	70.6%	+10.7%
Wealthiest 30%	74.8%	82.6%	+10.4%
Poorest 70%	25.2%	17.3%	–31.2%
Poorest 60%	17.0%	9.8%	–42.3%
Poorest 50%	11.1%	5.1%	–54.0%
Poorest 40%	6.8%	2.6%	–61.8%
Poorest 30%	3.6%	1.1%	–69.4%
Poorest 20%	1.7%	0.2%	–88.2%
Poorest 10%	.5%	0.0%	–100.0%

TABLE 3.4. *Shares of Real Estate Owned by Each Tenth of the Population:
Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Wealthiest 10%	42.8%	63.5%	61.3%	59.6%	55.1%
10%	18.1%	17.6%	17.3%	17.9%	19.6%
10%	13.6%	9.9%	10.9%	10.4%	12.2%
10%	10.0%	5.4%	6.9%	6.2%	7.3%
10%	6.4%	2.6%	3.3%	4.0%	4.3%
10%	4.3%	0.6%	0.1%	1.6%	1.1%
10%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
10%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
10%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Poorest 10%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 3.5. *Cumulative Percentages of the Population and Shares of Real Estate: Hunt County, 1870–1910*

% NET INCREASE OR DECREASE	1870	1910	
Wealthiest 10%	42.8%	55.1%	+28.7%
Wealthiest 20%	60.9	74.7%	+22.7%
Wealthiest 30%	74.5%	86.9%	+16.6%
Poorest 70%	24.5%	12.7%	–48.2%
Poorest 60%	14.5%	5.4%	–62.8%
Poorest 50%	8.1%	1.1%	–86.4%
Poorest 40%	3.8	0.0%	–100.0%
Poorest 30%	0.8%	0.0%	–100.0%
Poorest 20%	0.0%	0.0%	————
Poorest 10%	0.0%	0.0%	————

TABLE 3.6. *Average Value of Household Wealth, Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total	\$1,446 ^a	\$825	\$841	\$1,088	\$1,385
Among Owners	\$1,476	\$887	\$983	\$1,248	\$1,585

^aAll dollar amounts are averaged to the nearest dollar. The confidence level for all five samples is 95 percent; the confidence interval for average wealth holding is $\pm \$300$.

TABLE 3.7. *Average Household Wealth by Race, Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total	\$1,446 ^a	\$825	\$841	\$1,088	\$1,385
White	\$1,474	\$876	\$891	\$1,165	\$1,452
Black	\$73	\$28	\$53	\$324	\$398

^aAll dollar amounts are averaged to the nearest dollar. The confidence level for all five samples is 95 percent; the confidence interval for average wealth holding is $\pm \$300$.

TABLE 3.8. *Average Household Wealth by Race among Owners Only, Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total	\$1,446 ^a	\$825	\$841	\$1,088	\$1,385
White	\$1,490	\$915	\$1,009	\$1,284	\$1,631
Black	\$146	\$56	\$127	\$622	\$612

^aAll dollar amounts are averaged to the nearest dollar. The confidence level for all five samples is 95 percent; the confidence interval for average wealth holding is $\pm \$300$.

TABLE 3.9. *Percent of County Residents Owning No Property by Race, Hunt County, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total	2.0%	7.0%	14.5%	12.8%	12.6%
White	1.0%	4.2%	11.7%	9.2%	11.0%
Black	50.0%	50.0%	58.3%	47.8%	36.4%

TABLE 3.10. *Value of Farms (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	\$772	\$794	\$1,002	\$1,382	\$2,163
Per Acre	\$2.41	\$3.61	\$7.44	\$8.74	\$18.44

Percent increase per acre, 1870–1910 = +665.1%

TABLE 3.11. *Value of Town Property (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	\$1,991	\$1,650	\$1,352	\$1,087	\$1,284
Per Lot	\$498	\$660	\$944	\$623	\$847

Percent increase per lot, 1870–1910 = +70.1%

TABLE 3.12. *Percent of Hunt County's Total Household Wealth Made Up of Farms, 1870–1910*

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
45.3%	53.9%	45.9%	53.9%	58.0%

Net increase, 1870–1910 = +28.0%

TABLE 3.13. *Percent of Hunt County's Total Household Wealth Made Up of Town Property, 1870–1910*

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
1.1%	7.9%	29.7%	25.2%	25.1%

Net increase, 1870–1910 = +2,181.8%

TABLE 3.14. *Percent of Hunt County's Household Wealth Made Up of Real Estate, 1870–1910*

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
46.4%	61.9%	75.6%	79.1%	83.1%

Net increase, 1870–1910 = +79.1%

TABLE 3.15. *Percent of Hunt County Households Owning Some Farm and/or Town Real Estate, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Farm	80.0%	56.0%	38.5%	42.4%	37.1%
Town	4.0%	4.0%	18.5%	25.2%	27.1%

TABLE 3.16. *Number, Distribution, Value, and Rank of Horses, Mules, and Donkeys (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	8.1	3.7	3.4	3.5	2.9
Owners	89.0%	73.0%	61.5%	66.0%	57.4%
Per Animal	\$30	\$23	\$34	\$25	\$58
% of Household Wealth	25.2%	7.6%	8.4%	5.3%	7.0%

TABLE 3.17. *Number, Distribution, Value, and Rank of Cows (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	19.9	11.3	5.9	4.4	2.2
Owners	77.0%	59.0%	52.0%	48.8%	46.6%
Per Animal	\$4.53	\$5.45	\$5.10	\$11.41	\$32.42
% of Household Wealth	6.8%	4.4%	1.8%	2.2%	1.1%

TABLE 3.18. *Number, Distribution, Value, and Rank of Hogs (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	—	11.1	5.9	7.3	4.2
Owners	—	49.0%	34.5%	41.2%	24.0%
Per Animal	—	\$1	\$2	\$2	\$3
% of Household Wealth	—	0.7%	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%

TABLE 3.19. *Percent of Wealth Made Up of All Livestock*

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
33.2%	12.7%	10.6%	8.2%	8.3%

TABLE 3.20. *Amount, Distribution, and Rank of Cash (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	\$594	\$693	\$969	\$993	\$400
Owners	9.0%	7.0%	2.0%	4.8%	3.4%
% of Household Wealth	2.7%	5.9%	2.3%	4.4%	1.0%

TABLE 3.21. *Value, Distribution, and Rank of Miscellaneous Property (Household Averages)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Per Owner	\$490	\$415	\$357	\$192	\$343
Owners	80.0%	35.0%	23.5%	37.6%	25.4%
% of Household Wealth	17.4%	17.6%	10.0%	6.7%	6.3%

TABLE 3.22. *Percent of Wealth Made Up of Personal Property: Wagons, Livestock, Miscellaneous and Cash*

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
53.6%	38.1%	24.4%	20.9%	16.9%

TABLE 3.23. *Ranked Shares of Family Wealth: Hunt County, 1870 and 1910*

	1870	RANKING	1910	RANKING
Farms	45.3%	1	58.0%	1
Horses	25.2%	2	7.0%	3
Misc.	17.4%	3	6.3%	4
Milk cows	6.8%	4	1.1%	6
Cash	2.7%	5	1.0%	7
Wagons	1.9% ^a	6	1.3%	5
Town property	1.1%	7	25.1%	2
Hogs	0.7% ^a	8	0.2%	8

^a 1880TABLE 3.24. *Summary of Ranked Shares of Family Wealth: Hunt County, 1870 and 1910*

	1870 (RANK)	1910 (RANK)	INCREASE/DECREASE
Real Estate	46.4% (1)	83.1% (1)	+79.1%
Livestock	33.2% (2)	8.3% (3)	-75.0%
Other Personal	20.4% (3)	8.6% (2)	-57.8%

TABLE 3.25. *Women and Ownership: Percentage of Farm Households Headed by Women, Hunt County, 1870-1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total	1.3%	3.6%	—	6.4%	5.5%
Owners	1.6%	—	—	6.7%	12.5%
Tenants	0.9%	—	—	5.7%	2.1%

TABLE 3.26. *Race of Hunt County Farmers*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
White	92.6%	95.3%	—	97.0%	96.6%
Black	7.4%	4.7%	—	3.0%	3.4%

TABLE 3.27. *Race and Ownership: Tenancy Rates for Blacks and Whites*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
White	42.4%	—	—	58.5%	66.7%
Black	88.2%	—	—	88.9%	80.0%

TABLE 3.28. *Place of Birth of Hunt County Farmers (Heads of Households)*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Texas	9.2%	13.9%	—	20.9%	33.9%
Upper South	55.9%	51.8%	—	37.8%	31.2%
Lower South	28.4%	27.5%	—	37.5%	33.6%
United States	4.8%	5.7%	—	2.4%	1.4%
Foreign	0.9%	1.1%	—	0.7%	0.0%
Unknown	0.9%	0.0%	—	0.7%	0.0%

TABLE 3.29. *Place of Birth and Tenancy Rates*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Texas	61.9%	—	—	67.7%	74.7%
Upper South	46.9%	—	—	58.0%	63.7%
Lower South	40.0%	—	—	57.7%	63.3%
United States	45.4%	—	—	42.9%	50.0%
Foreign	0.0%	—	—	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 3.30. *Size of Household: Hunt County Farmers*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Average	5.5	5.5	—	5.2	5.1

TABLE 3.31. *Household Size and Ownership: Averages for Hunt County*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total	5.5	5.5	—	5.2	5.1
Owners	6.1	—	—	5.0	5.1
Tenants	4.8	—	—	5.6	5.1

TABLE 3.32. *Household Size and Tenancy Rates*

SIZE	1870	1900	1910
1-2	72.7%	75.5%	79.2%
3-4	51.4%	62.0%	60.5%
5-6	44.8%	53.0%	70.0%
7-8	50.0%	59.3%	58.2%
9-10	10.0%	39.3%	68.4%
11-12	33.3%	83.3%	87.5%
13-14	—	—	100.0%

TABLE 3.33. *Hunt County Farmers' Mean Age*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Average	37.9	39.1	—	41.8	40.0

The sample sizes (1870 = 229; 1880 = 280; 1900 = 296; 1910 = 292) afford a confidence level of 95 percent certainty at the confidence interval of ± 3 years.

TABLE 3.34. *Farmers' Age and Tenancy Rate*

AGE	1870	1900	1910
Teens and Twenties	62.2%	88.1%	90.8%
Thirties	40.3%	67.6%	75.3%
Forties	42.6%	52.1%	66.7%
Fifty and up	29.5%	37.8%	36.5%

APPENDIX C

METHODS FOR CHAPTER 3

Household Wealth Distribution and the Farm Family in Hunt County, Texas, 1870–1910

Tax Rolls, 1870–1910

I determined the sample sizes from the Hunt County Tax Rolls for the years 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910 through the initial use of a pilot sample of twenty-five cases per year. I used the pilot samples to determine variance for the variable “wealth,” which I then used as an estimate of the real variance of wealth in the entire population. This figure (variance) governs the size of the statistically valid sample. The higher the variance (the greater the variation from around the mean), the larger the sample must be in order to render results within desired confidence levels. The ultimate size of the sample can be raised or lowered to reasonable levels by changing the confidence level (not recommended), changing the confidence interval (which can make more sense depending on the value of the mean), and by applying the formula for correction for finite population size found in R. S. Schofield, “Sampling in Historical Research,” in E. A. Wrigley, Ed., *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 146–90.

After the variance within the pilot sample was determined using the formula mentioned above (sum of squared deviation divided by size of pilot sample minus 1) provided by Schofield (actually, letting the software program Statistical Program for the Social Sciences X figure the

variance of the pilot sample), this variance then determined the size of the actual sample when used in “Formula 8” provided by Schofield, which takes into account the decisions made regarding confidence level and confidence interval (see “Formula 8” in Schofield, 163).

The level of confidence for all five samples is 95 percent for the given confidence interval. The confidence intervals, however, had to be varied to offset the wildly fluctuating levels of variance in the pilot samples in order to maintain some control over the sample sizes. Finally, in cases where the indicated sample size represented a significantly large portion of the total population, at Schofield’s suggestion I corrected for finite population (see “Formula 6” in Schofield, 162).

Finally, the samples, population counts, confidence intervals, confidence levels, and wealth means for each year are listed below:

TABLE A1. *Hunt County Tax Roll Samples, 1870–1910*

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total Population (households)	1,337	4,064	6,809	10,345	11,996
Sample size	100	100	200	250	350
Confidence interval	±\$100	±\$50	±\$100	±\$200	±\$300
Confidence level	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%
Mean wealth	\$1,446	\$825	\$841	\$1,088	\$1,385

All sample sizes have been rounded to a number divisible by ten in order to allow for decile tables. Further, the ± confidence interval refers to a 95 percent certainty that the sample mean is within ½ of the value of the confidence interval’s value (above or below) of the true population mean. For example, in 1910 this sample size ensures that the average from the sample has a 95 percent chance of being no less than \$150 of the true mean or no more than \$150 of the true mean.

Systematic sampling

“A systematic sampling is most like a random sample when the population to be sampled is listed in a random order. This can effectively be so for the purposes of the sample when the items are ordered by some characteristic, say alphabetically by surname, which has no relation to the characteristic under investigation in the sample” (Schofield, 153–54). Such was the case in the tax rolls.

1870

The 1870 sample size was 100 from a total population of 1,337 contained in 46 pages of tax rolls. By taking two cases per page (first and last entry) I could get 92 cases; I then started over and took one case (middle entry) per page from the pages 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 36, 43, and 3.

1880

The 1880 sample size was 100 from a total population of 4,064 contained in 137 pages. I took the tenth case from the top of the page of every other page starting on page two. When I arrived at the last page I started over and took the tenth case from the top of every other page starting on page one. I used the tenth case unless the designation "Agent For" or "Co." appeared in the name. Then I went up or down to the nearest household case. In case of less than ten cases per page, I took the case associated with the tenth space or entry line.

1890

The 1890 sample size was 200 from a population of 6,809 contained in 221 pages. If I took only one case per page, the people on the last 21 pages would stand no chance of being included. So, I took the tenth case every other page beginning on page one until I reached the end; then, I took one case from every other page beginning with page two until I reached 200. When there were less than ten entries I took the one on or connected to the tenth slot. In case of a business ("Agt" or "Co." in name) I went to the closest household entry, going up one case then down if necessary.

1900

The 1900 sample size was 250 from a population of 10,345 contained in 314 pages. I used the same entry selection as for 1890 except that I skipped every tenth and eleventh pages to ensure those entries nearer the end would have an equal chance for inclusion, ending on page 314. Furthermore, under heading "Investments or Cash" I included the six categories: "Amount of Money at Bank, Banker, Broker, or Stock Jobber," "Amount of Moneys other than Bank, Banker, Broker, or Stock Jobber," "Amount of Credits other then Bank, Banker, Broker, or Stock Jobber," "Amount and Value of Bonds and Stock other than United States Bonds," "Amount and Value of Shares of Capital Stock Companies and Associations," and "Values of Companies and Corporations other than hereinbefore Enumerated."

1910

The 1910 sample size was 350 cases from a population of 11,996 contained in 387 pages. Case selection was the same as for 1900. I took alternatively the tenth and twentieth case on each page (one case per page) skipping every tenth page.

Formulae

For further explanations of this technique and for the specific formulae used, see R. S. Schofield, “Sampling in Historical Research,” in E. A. Wrigley, (ed.) *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 146–90.

Manuscript Census, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910

I took a systematic random sample of 1,097 households from the manuscript censuses for Hunt County, Texas, for 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910. The U.S. Census 1890 manuscripts are unavailable due to loss by fire. The size of each decade’s sample was based on the requirements necessary to garner a confidence level of 95 percent for a confidence interval of ± 3 years for the variable “age of household head.” Each sample size was based on the level of variance for variable “age” found in a pilot sample.

Sample sizes

TABLE A2. *Hunt County Manuscript Census Samples, 1870–1910*

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
229	280	0	296	292

1870

The main concern here was to gather a sample large enough to ensure a reasonably close approximation of farmers’ mean age. This was also true for the 1880, 1900, and 1910 samples as well. To that end, I first took a pilot sample of 25 cases for the variable “age” from the 1870 Hunt County Manuscript Census to determine variance (as computed by, again, the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences X). The variance was 140.2. The total population was 1,983. Using the formulae found in Schofield, I determined that the correct sample size was 229. See table at the end

of this discussion. I then took a systematic random sample of the 1870 Hunt County Manuscript Census by selecting the first entry whose occupation was “farmer” from every sixth page.¹ This spread the cases out over the entire census, theoretically giving each individual an equal chance to be included. Variables included were race, sex, age, ownership status, place of birth, and number in family. Ownership status was deduced from presence (or lack thereof) of real property ownership.

1880

For 1880 I used the same method as above with the same goals. From a pilot sample of 25 I learned that the estimated population variance for variable “age” was 169.79. A sample size of 280 cases would give the confidence interval and level I had selected. I took every tenth entry (starting with entry number ten) who was a farmer; if not a farmer, then I went back one entry, then forward one entry, then back, etc., until I arrived at the nearest farmer to the tenth entry. In that manner I proceeded to the end, then turned back and took every fifth entry starting from the fifth case until I reached 280 cases. Again the variables were sex, race, age, place of birth, and size of family. Ownership status was in no way indicated on the 1880 manuscript census. In the case of variable “family size” I limited my count to a “personal household” of the household head; that is, I included spouse, children, stepchildren, other kin, and hired hands boarding with the family. I excluded boarders with livelihoods indicated to be elsewhere. Also, in the 1880 manuscript census there appears, besides “farmers,” these other citations: “fl”—farm laborer, “wf”—works on farm, and “farming”—no explanation given. (It is my impression that this designation was reserved for blacks, probably sharecroppers; however, since neither all blacks nor any whites, some of whom were renters, were included under this heading, I could not use it to distinguish sharecroppers from share tenants or all tenants from owners.) Nevertheless, I did include those listed as “farming” along with those listed as “farmer.” I excluded entries labeled “fl” or “wf.”

1890

Most of the 1890 manuscripts were lost to fire in the 1920s, including that for Hunt County.

1900

My methods and goals in the 1900 sample are the same as shown above. From a pilot sample of the 1900 Manuscript Census for Hunt County

I determined that the estimated variance for the variable “age” in the entire population was 139.74. Using the formulae described in Schofield and shown below, I determined that the correct sample size for 1900 was 296 in order to render the desired confidence interval and confidence level. See table below. Again, the ownership status of the householder (farmers only) was clearly indicated. The variables selected were sex, race, age, ownership status, and the size of family (as defined above).

1910

In the 1910 census sample I used the same methods and goals used in the 1870, 1880, and 1900 samples. From a pilot sample of the 1910 Manuscript Census for Hunt County, I determined that the estimated population variance for the variable “age” was 179.25. Thus, using the formula found in Schofield, I arrived at a sample size of 296 cases from a total population of 4,085, roughly 5 percent. I then took every twentieth case that was a farmer, employing the same technique as above to arrive at nearest farmer. This time ownership status was clearly indicated. The variables were race, sex, age, place of birth, and number in family or personal household.

TABLE A3. *Samples Drawn from Household Heads, Hunt County Manuscript Censuses, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910*

	1870	1880	1900	1910
Household heads	1,983	2,637	9,048	9,798
Sample size	229	280	296	292
Confidence interval (age in years)	±3	±3	±3	±3
Confidence level	95%	95%	95%	95%

For further explanations and specific formulae used, see R. S. Schofield, “Sampling in Historical Research,” in E. A. Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 146–90; Robert S. Weiss, *Statistics in Social Research: An Introduction* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1968), 220–43.

NOTES

Chapter 1. Introduction

1. Lena Mae Stiff Odle, "Today I Am Seventy Nine," unpublished manuscript, 3; Charles A. McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990, Greenville.

2. Minerva Thomas to H. M. Hunter, Sept. 4, 1877, H. M. Hunter Collection.

3. Robert C. McMath Jr., *American Populism*, 29.

4. Mollie McWhorter, "Pioneer Citizen of This Section Tells of Her Early Experiences Since Moving Here in Year of 1866," *Commerce Journal*, March 26, 1933, 1; for a discussion of evangelical revivals and manhood, see Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 144–45.

5. U.S. Senate, Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony*, S. Doc. 415, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 1915, *The Land Question in the Southwest*, Vol. 9, 9034 (hereafter cited as the Walsh Commission); Pinkney Bowie to Mary Elizabeth Stribling Wilkison, letter, June 2, 1902.

6. Bill Cecil-Fronsman uses the term "common whites" and argues—as I do—for important points of commonality between poor whites and plain folk. Similarly, I. A. Newby, writing exclusively of the New South, significantly widens others' definitions and claims the term "plain folk" for the poor whites as well as the rural middle class. Wayne Flynt, Randolph B. Campbell, Richard Lowe, and J. William Harris all—more or less—stress commonality between poor whites and plain folk. Some argue for identity or near identity of economic interests (an argument that will come under pressure in the New South) and others for a common *mentalité*. Steven Hahn, Lacy K. Ford, Orville Burton, and Stephanie McCurry all wrestle with this issue with slightly varying results. Hahn and Ford dispense with the term "plain folk" altogether—perhaps because of its association with Owsley's less savory arguments—in favor of the term "yeomen." Hyde quotes Burton admitting that the "line between poor and yeomen was never distinct." McCurry seems to make a signal contribution of setting the line at work, at least for the upward boundary. Farmers whose only work was managing the work of others were no longer yeoman. Farmers, even slaveowners, who worked in the field at least some of the time, were plain

folk, according to this view. Applied to the New South, her rule may be a good delimiter when looking at landlords with tenants (that is, landlords who themselves farmed as opposed to landlords whose only work was managing tenants). Samuel C. Hyde Jr., "Plain Folk Reconsidered: Historiographical Ambiguity in Search of Definition," *Journal of Southern History* 71 (Nov. 2005), 804, 806, and 811; Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 51; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); J. Wayne Flynt, *Poor but Proud*; Randolph B. Campbell and Richard Lowe, *Planters and Plain Folk*; J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society*; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*; Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*.

7. Hyde, "Plain Folk Reconsidered," 818.

8. Donald E. Winters, "'Plain Folk' of the Old South Reexamined: Economic Democracy in Tennessee," *Journal of Southern History* 53 (1987): 565–86; Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 32–33.

9. Hyde, "Plain Folk Reconsidered," 821.

10. John Solomon Otto, "The Migration of the Southern Plain Folk: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (1985): 183–200, and "Southern 'Plain Folk' Agriculture: A Reconsideration," *Plantation Society in the Americas* 2 (1983): 29–36, and "Plain Folk, Lost Frontiersmen, and Hillbillies: The Southern Mountain Folk in History and Popular Culture," *Southern Studies* 26 (1987): 5–17.

11. Perhaps Hyde's most important contribution is in suggesting the size of the plain folk. According to his definition, in 1850 Neshoba County, Mississippi, the federal census shows a community utterly dominated by a gigantic plain folk majority of 89 percent of the white population. Even Hyde leaves the door open for the other camp when he quotes Wayne Flynt as arguing that "it is impossible to separate poor white from middle class yeomen, so similar were there common interests." Hyde, "Plain Folk Reconsidered," 809, note 12, quoting from Flynt, *Poor but Proud*, 12. Mid-twentieth-century southern historian Frank Owsley coined the term "plain folk" for his own purposes, but it has been widely adopted since, even among his critics. Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*; Samuel C. Hyde Jr., ed. *Plain Folk of the South Revisited*; I. A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South*; Carl R. Osthaus, "The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk: Labor and Religion in the Old South." *Journal of Southern History* 70 (2004): 745–82; Campbell and Lowe, *Planters and Plain Folk*.

12. James H. Conrad and Thad Sitton, *Freedom Colonies*; Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South*; and Richard Westmacott, *African-American Gardens and Yards*.

13. The forty East Texas counties are: Anderson, Angelina, Bowie, Camp, Cass, Cherokee, Delta, Franklin, Gregg, Hardin, Harris, Harrison, Henderson,

Hopkins, Houston, Jasper, Lamar, Liberty, Marion, Montgomery, Morris, Nacogdoches, Newton, Panola, Polk, Rains, Red River, Rusk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Smith, Titus, Trinity, Tyler, Upshur, Van Zandt, Walker, and Wood. The forty-three Central Texas counties are: Austin, Bastrop, Bell, Bosque, Brazos, Burleson, Caldwell, Collin, Cooke, Coryell, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Falls, Fannin, Fayette, Freestone, Grayson, Grimes, Hamilton, Hill, Hood, Hunt, Johnson, Kaufman, Lavaca, Lee, Leon, Limestone, McLennan, Madison, Milam, Montague, Navarro, Parker, Robertson, Rockwall, Somervell, Tarrant, Travis, Washington, Williamson, and Wise. I chose to categorize Hunt County as one of the forty-three Central Texas counties; there is a similar level of arbitrariness in my categorization of a few of the other border counties along the East Texas–Central Texas divide.

Chapter 2. From Homeplace to No Place

1. Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, “The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation,” *American Historical Review* 85 (1980): 1095–1118.

2. Unless otherwise specifically cited all population and agricultural data are from the Ninth through Thirteenth U.S. Censuses. Individual citations follow by decade: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census, 1870*, vol. 1: 63–66; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census, 1870*, vol. 3: 250–61, 363; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, 1880*, part 1, 371–74; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census, *Report on the Production of Agriculture in the United States at the Tenth Census, 1880*, 88–93, 133–36, 170–72, 205–208, 242, 312–17; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census, *Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890*, part 1, 508–11; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census, *Reports on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States, 182–88*, 228–31, 348–50, 385–87, 396–97, 491–93; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Population*, vol. 1, part 1, 557–60; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Agriculture*, vol. 5, part 1, 124–31, 298–301, 480–85; vol. 6, part 2, 184–87, 391–94, 434–35; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population*, vol. 3: 804–50; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Agriculture*, vol. 7: 632–700.

3. In 1880 these Lower South states averaged a tenancy rate of 46.5 percent compared to 37.6 percent for Texas.

4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census: Population*, 806 and 826; sample of the Hunt County Manuscript Censuses, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910, N = 1,097 households.

Tenancy Rates for the Lower South, 1880–1910

	1880	1890	1900	1910
S. Carolina	50.3%	55.3%	61.1%	63.0%
Georgia	45.0%	53.5%	59.9%	65.6%
Alabama	46.8%	48.6%	57.7%	60.2%
Mississippi	43.8%	52.8%	62.4%	66.1%
Louisiana	35.2%	44.4%	58.0%	55.3%
Texas	37.6%	41.9%	49.7%	52.6%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Farm Tenancy in the United States: An Analysis of the Results of the 1920 Census Relative to Farms Classified by Tenure Supplemented by Pertinent Data From Other Sources*, compiled by E. A. Goldenweiser and Leon E. Truesdell, Census Monographs IV, 8.

5. Terry G. Jordan, with John L. Bean Jr. and William M. Holmes, *Texas*, 73–83. For the increasing participation of Mexican Americans and Mexicans in the cotton economy after 1910, see Neil Foley, *White Scourge*.

6. For population see note 2; area figures found in the *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 171–287.

7. Walsh Commission, 8997.

8. While the U.S. Census figures (Thirteenth Census, vol. 7, 665) show a \$40 value in 1910, *The Texas Almanac* reported Hunt County average per acre value in 1914 as \$33. *Texas Almanac*, 1914, 207.

9. Schweninger, *Black Property Owners*, 145, 164–65; Conrad and Sitton, *Freedom Colonies*; Dorothy Wood Moore, “Andrew Hurdle Was a Leader in Local Churches, Education,” *Greenville (Tex.) Herald Banner*, Feb. 27, 1991, A3.

10. For an excellent discussion of this issue in South Central Texas, see Foley, *White Scourge*, 10–11 and 86; Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 127–28; Harold D. Woodman, *New South, New Law*.

Chapter 3. Farmers and Wealth Distribution in Hunt County, Texas, 1870–1910

1. In a population where each individual owned exactly as much as the next person, the Gini coefficient would be 0. In the opposite case, where one individual owned all of the property within a population and everyone else owned nothing, the Gini coefficient would be 1. Thus, the closer the measurement is to 1, the higher the level of concentration of wealth in the population being measured. Gavin Wright, *Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 25.

2. All of the following information on personal and real household wealth in Hunt County, Texas, was obtained from systematic random samples (see appendix C for discussion of method) taken from the Hunt County Tax Rolls for 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910 (Hunt County Tax Rolls, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910).

3. Wright, *Political Economy*, 26.
4. Gavin Wright's measurements of 1860 wealth concentration in the "Cotton South" finds that the wealthiest 10 percent owned 58.6 percent of the wealth (Gini coefficient = .73). Wright, *Political Economy*, 45–46. Randolph Campbell's and Richard Lowe's survey of wealth concentration in 1860 Texas shows that the wealthiest 9.6 percent owned 63.6 percent of all wealth (Gini coefficient = .74). Campbell and Lowe observe that antebellum Texas was no "land of economic equality" and that wealth was indeed highly "concentrated in the hands of a minority of individuals" especially in the plantation belt. Nevertheless, North Central Texas (including Hunt County) measured the lowest levels of wealth concentration among the four 1860 Texas regions studied by Campbell and Lowe (Gini coefficient = .67). Campbell and Lowe, *Planters and Plain Folk*, 47.
5. Walter L. Buenger found that between 1890 and 1914 in Northeast Texas "wealth tended to spread out among the top third of the population" with the middle third "in roughly the same spot or only slightly better off" and with the poorest third losing ground. While acknowledging the straitened circumstances of the bottom third, Buenger sees "a broad middle and upper middle class" enjoying a "reasonable prosperity" by 1914. While "rising prosperity" in Northeast Texas was due in part to higher cotton prices, railroads, lumber companies, and banks also had "transformed the economy" with greater opportunity by the 1910s. Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 39–58 and 71.
6. The Gini coefficients for the concentration of ownership of real estate (here defined as farmland and buildings and town lots and buildings) follow remarkably close to the pattern for all wealth except that the level of concentration for real estate was even higher across the board than for total wealth. In 1870 the Gini coefficient for concentration of ownership of land in Hunt County was .60 (compared to .59 for all wealth); by 1910 the Gini coefficient was .72 (compared to .67 for all wealth). Clearly, over time, ownership of land had become more concentrated into relatively fewer hands in Hunt County. Here, again, the decade 1870–80 witnessed the highest jump in the level of concentration of land ownership. The Gini coefficient went from .60 in 1870 to .76 in 1880. Thereafter, this indicator of relative concentrations stayed fairly stable while declining to .75 in 1890 and .73 in 1900.
7. Schweninger, *Black Property Owners*, 164.
8. *Texas Almanac*, 1914, 207.
9. The value of the variable "town property" is limited to the value of real estate (lots and buildings). The value of any contents of such buildings, such as mercantile inventory, I included under the variable "miscellaneous property."
10. In 1910 24.2 percent of Hunt County residents lived in "urban places" of 2,500 or more (U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census: Population*, 826).
11. Walsh Commission, 9005–14.
12. Lula Bird Brantom interview.
13. Blanche Amanda Gray interview.

14. Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 111. By the 1920s a survey of one blackland county found sizable portions of Central Texas farm families regularly going without meat. Rebecca Sharpless, “‘Little to Eat’: Women and the Effects of Single-crop Farming on Rural Central Texas, 1900–1940,” Nov. 13, 1993, Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Orlando, Florida.

15. Manuscript Censuses of Hunt County, Texas, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910. See appendix C for sampling method.

16. The actual Hunt County tenancy rate appears in the published aggregate censuses for 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910. Because of sampling error, the tenancy rates contained in the samples below vary some from the actual tenancy rate, but, at least for 1900 and 1910, not by much: the sample’s Hunt County tenancy rate was off by 5 points in 1900 and 1.9 points in 1910. The 1870 sample tenancy rate of 45.9 percent is far outside the historical trend and results partially, no doubt, from sampling error; however, the published census does not report tenancy rates for 1870, so, unfortunately, there exists no authoritative standard to measure this figure against. (I deduced whether farmers were tenants or owners from their land ownership status.) Still, the presence of two different groups in 1870 may have elevated the tenancy rate above 1880 and 1890. In 1870 fully 7 percent of all farm operators were black (with a sample tenancy rate of 88.2 percent); in 1910 that same group made up only 3 percent of the sample and 5 percent of the actual farm population and had a tenancy rate ten points lower than 1870. Further, the presence of many formerly landowning white migrants recently arrived from the Lower South presents still another explanation for some of the heightened 1870 tenancy rate. The temporal nature of that explanation has obvious appeal; in a short time many of these joined the ranks of landowners, thus lowering the tenancy rate. More than likely, the 1870 actual Hunt County tenancy rate was closer to 30 percent. Since authoritative figures do exist from 1880 on, the suspect 1870 tenancy rate proves no great stumbling block, and the usefulness of separating out tenants from owners in 1870 will soon be apparent. Even if tenants were overrepresented in the 1870 sample, this in no way weakens the soundness of the demographic data about both owners and tenants in that 1870 sample. The manuscript censuses recorded no information on land ownership or tenure status for 1880, and, unfortunately, the 1890 manuscript censuses were destroyed by fire. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, 665. Data on Texas from Tenth Census, *Agriculture*, 88–317; Eleventh Census, *Agriculture*, 182–493; *Twelfth Census: Agriculture*, vol. 5, part 1, 124–485, vol. 6, part 2, 184–485; *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, 632–700.

17. *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, 632–700.

18. Ninth Census, *Wealth and Industry*, 127; Tenth Census, *Agriculture*, 665.

19. Lower South: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Upper South: the rest of the former Confederacy (except Texas) plus Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri.

20. *The Handbook of Texas*, 865.

21. Walsh Commission, 9207. Ironically, landlords preferred tenants with large families and sometimes asked prospective renters how many children they had in order to ensure that the tenant had enough cotton choppers and pickers (Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 39). A 1914 survey found farm owners averaged slightly larger families than did tenants (Walton Peteet, *Farming Credit in Texas*, 20).

22. James A. Henretta, “Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser. 35 (Jan. 1978): 6–7.

23. Unfortunately, I cannot compare the 1870 sample figures for percentage of black farmers and their tenancy rate to the aggregate census because that data was not recorded for 1870 (*Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, vol. 7, 642).

24. For an analysis of white tenants’ racism, see Foley, *White Scourge*.

25. Looking at Northeast Texas from the 1880s until the 1930s, Walter L. Buenger views the period and place with more optimism. Indeed, his focus is on the middle and upper third of society and for them he sees a “rising prosperity.” The transformation of the economy with the coming of railroads, banks, and other commercial ventures after the turn of the century lifted the standard of living of the upper two-thirds. With the reunion of ex-Populists and reform Democrats after 1902, he also believes the political system became more flexible and responsive to the needs of most Texans. Buenger does confront, briefly, the issue of winners and losers. Of the post-poll tax political system he writes that “blacks and poor whites lost the most. The white middle class gained the most.” The differences in interpretation between this study and Buenger’s may lie, mostly, in where the two studies are looking. Where I see a lack of choices for tenants and sharecroppers, he sees increased opportunities for farm owners and tenants with capital. Where I see the dominant political system ignoring the interests of the poor majority, he sees it responding to a prosperous majority. “Instead of fostering a completely closed and inflexible system, the new, larger, and more multifactional Democratic party by 1912 discouraged the most virulent forms of racism, encouraged voting by white males, and in a few years would encourage the voting of white females. Even before 1912 the system allowed the legal and cultural changes needed to promote prosperity” (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 75 and 103).

Chapter 4. “A Legitimate and Useful Life”

1. Walsh Commission, 9126.

2. Mack Hume interview.

3. Unless otherwise noted, all information concerning the collective biography comes from the following interviews. R. D. Bell interview; Branom interview; Hyatt Cheek interview; Estell Cunningham interview; Susan Danner interview; Martha Miller Evans interview; Eunice Odale Jones Ewalt interview;

Mattie Coella Self George interview; Elizabeth Davidson Glenn interview; Gray interview; Hume interview; Mary Jernigin interview; Willie Clowp Jeter interview; Charley Mitchell Jones interview; Gertrude Venus Jones interview; Gwendolyn Cox King interview; Lois Lacey Lewis interview; Jess Loftin interview; Bessie Pope Looney interview; Paul Mathews interview; McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990; Julia Horn McWhirter interview; Ocie Miller Moxley interview; Beulah Bell Nicholson interview; Clifton Peoples interview; Robert Lee Rice interview, Mar. 22, 1991; Mary Hagan Roach interview; Sallie Robinson interview; George Zachary Ryan interview; Carl Ervin Starrett interview; Natalie Washington Thompson interview; Nora Thrasher interview; Joe D. Wallace interview; Merl Otney Bledsoe Ward interview; W. Fletcher Warren interview, Apr. 18, 1990; Tom F. Washington interview; Amanda Robert White interview; Eddie Curtis Williams interview; James Williams interview.

4. Thirty-two of the thirty-nine subjects were white while seven were African American. This roughly equaled the racial mix in the eastern third of Texas at the time. In 1910 blacks comprised fewer than 10 percent of Hunt Countians, while they made up around a quarter of the entire eighty-three-county region's population. Over half of the interviewees were white women (21), followed by white men (11), black men (5), and black women (2). All of the interviewees were native to the South, mostly to Texas. Thirty-two were born in the eighty-three-county eastern region of the state, another three were born elsewhere in Texas, and the remaining four came from Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia. The interviews focused on their youthful experiences in East and Central Texas. Of the thirty-nine interviewees, twenty-four hailed from the Central Texas blackland while fifteen represented East Texas.

5. *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, 632–700 and 642.

6. Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South*, 109.

7. William Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 40; Walsh Commission, 9209; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 51.

8. Nicholson interview; Wright, *Old South, New South*, 107–15.

9. Walsh Commission, 9207; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 21.

10. Dorothy Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 141; McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990, and Thrasher interview.

11. Peoples interview.

12. Oral history interviewees from Central Texas also recalled the practice of sharing fresh-killed beef, as well as the limits to such practices. One subject saw it as a club. "We didn't belong to it, 'cause we didn't ever have no beef" (Thad Sitton, ed., *Harder Than Hardscrabble*, 49). Historical archaeologist Joe Saunders reports similar findings regarding the scarcity of beef among early-twentieth-century Delta Countians. Joe Saunders, "Ethnohistorical Research" (Unpublished paper, Southern Methodist University, 1986), 26.

13. Walsh Commission, 9210.

14. Farm laborers were even less able to keep hogs. W. S. Noble, militant

editor of the Rockdale, Milam County, *Actual Farmer*, reported the firing of a farm laborer near Denison for the infraction of keeping three hogs (Walsh Commission, 9022, 9033, and 9135).

15. Gray and Loftin interviews; Peoples, Washington, Gray, Loftin, James Williams, and Lewis interviews.

16. The practice of using hog intestines for sausage casings was not universal; there were variations between the classes. The son of Hunt County merchant and banker Horace M. Mathews (1872–1935) recalled that his family used cloth sacks instead of hog intestines to hold their sausage (Mathews interview).

17. Gray interview.

18. George interview; Wallace interview; Gray interview.

19. Robert Lee Rice, “Mama Rice” (Unpublished manuscript, January 1990), 4. Copy in Rice Collection, Special Collections and Archives, James G. Gee Library, Texas A&M University–Commerce; Hume, Looney and Warren interviews.

20. Gray interview; Branom interview; Peoples interview; William Edward Garnett, *Some Socially Significant Rural Conditions*, 11; M. Rebecca Sharpless, “Technology behind a Mule: Breaking the Blacklands and the Cotton Empire,” presented at the Texas Blacklands: Land, History, and Culture Symposium, Apr. 19–21, 1990, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

21. The family of Elizabeth Davidson Glenn (b. 1893), daughter of a Greenville stock dealer, kept a garden of only twenty by forty feet; Mary Hagan Roach (b. 1898), daughter of a Greenville dry goods and clothing merchant, recalled a garden of only fifty by fifty feet. In fact, her family’s prosperity allowed them the luxury of using the garden only as a source of in-season delicacies. Her mother did not preserve vegetables until it became a patriotic gesture during the First World War (Glenn and Roach interviews; see also Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 35–43).

22. Sitton writes that Texas farm “families preserved home produced food-stuffs with an almost religious fervor” (Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 35).

23. Tenants were told that sweet potatoes would not grow on the blackland of the cotton belt. Hyatt Cheek (b. 1897) and Robert Lee Rice (b. 1901), both sons of white Hunt County tenants, reported as a given that their families produced no sweet potatoes on the blackland because they would not “do well.” While the blackland may not have been the most suitable of soils for the plant, small blackland farm owners, still in charge of their own operations, continued to grow sweet potatoes to feed their families and to maintain their independence. Lois Lacey Lewis (b. 1897), daughter of a blackland Hunt County owner, remembered one year that her nine-member family consumed sixty bushels of sweet potatoes, or about seven bushels each. Cheek, Rice (Mar. 22, 1991), and Lewis interviews; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States*, vol. 3, 250–61; *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, 632–700.

24. Lewis interview; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 53. This decline in the condition of the farm family resulted also from the increased pressures on farm women, traditionally gardeners and food preservers, to spend more time in the fields tending the money crop. Sharpless, "Technology behind a Mule," 7; Garrett, *Some Socially Significant Rural Conditions*, 11.

25. Peoples and Wallace interviews; Rice, "Mama Rice," 1–5; Thrasher interview.

26. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 110.

27. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 106 and 110.

28. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 191; Rice, "Mama Rice," 3–4. For a full discussion of Texas farm women's relationship to food production and preparation see Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 109–57.

29. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 172–73; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 20.

30. Branom interview; King interview; McWhirter interview.

31. Moxley interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 98; Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 73.

32. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 98; Washington interview; George interview; Jeter interview.

33. McWhirter interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 98; Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 76.

34. Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 300–303; G. L. Vaughan, *Cotton Renter's Son*, 192; Starrett interview; Ward interview.

35. Walsh Commission, 9125–26, 9016.

36. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 98–100, 149–63; Hume, Danner, and Jernigin interviews.

37. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 98, 100; Hume, Lewis, McWhirter, George, Loftin, Rice, Robinson, and E. Williams interviews.

38. McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 117–18; Mathews interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 115.

39. McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990, Hume, Moxley, George, Jeter, White, and Robinson interviews.

40. *Texas Almanac*, 1925, 110. These figures represent twelve-month averages. Spot prices for cotton varied from month to month, depending on the continuing strength of demand in a chronically saturated market. By hitting the buyers on just the right day, some farmers could have garnered an extra nine dollars per bale during the 1912 marketing season (*Texas Almanac*, 1925, 11 and 110).

41. *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, vol. 7, 632–700; *Texas Almanac*, 1904, 94; *Texas Almanac*, 1904, 94; Walsh Commission, 8996. By 1914 blackland landlords began demanding one-third and even one-half the cotton of tenants who supplied their own teams and provisions, thus qualifying them (according to custom) for "thirds and fourths" status, that is payment of one-fourth the cotton as rent (Walsh Commission, 9239).

42. Estimating family size at the parents' age of forty poses at least two prob-

lems. First, while some women married in their early twenties, it was also common for some to have married in their teens. Second, Hunt County farm families in 1910 experienced an infant mortality rate of almost 15 percent (Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 17–18 and 40).

43. *Sears and Roebuck Catalogue 1902*, 1031–1154; Garnett reports that in 1923 a single doctor's visit cost rural families as much as twenty dollars (Garnett, *Some Socially Significant Rural Conditions*, 23). According to Lois Lacey Lewis (b. 1897) doctors' bills and "special occasions" were the only times her farm family needed cash (Lewis interview). Sharpless reports a childbirth visit going for five dollars in 1905 but forty to fifty dollars and over by the late 1920s (Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 45).

44. Mathews interview; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 19 and 41; Sam Rayburn Papers, Folder 1906–1909, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas; Thomas J. Woofter Jr., *Black Migration*, 87.

45. Walsh Commission, 9086.

46. *Ibid.*, 9003; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 25–79; Rayburn Papers, Folder 1906–1909, Rayburn Library; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 6–7.

47. The tenant did not know the actual percentage; he only knew that a bushel of corn cost \$0.75 when purchased with cash and \$1.25 when bought on credit (Walsh Commission, 9018).

48. Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 14 and 79.

49. Robinson interview, 4–6; Walsh Commission, 9030–33; Rice interview.

50. Walsh Commission, 9102.

51. Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 60–69; Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 45–46; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 5–9.

52. Walsh Commission, 9012–18; Most of the fifty-eight physicians operating in Hunt County were also landowners. The wealthiest half of Hunt County physicians (twenty-nine men) owned 10,656 acres, enough land for 137 average-sized Hunt County farms (Hunt County Tax Rolls, 1910, Microfilm, County Tax Records, Special Collections, James G. Gee Library, Texas A&M University–Commerce).

53. Gray interview; Walsh Commission, 9015.

54. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 160–87.

55. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 45; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 106; Danner interview.

56. Looney interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 149–51; McWhirter interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 151.

57. Rice, "Mama Rice," 3; Danner and Ward interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 166.

58. Rice, "Mama Rice," 2; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 151, 166–67.

59. Gray interview; Walsh Commission, 9025; for women's roles as "petty-commodities producers," see Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 3 and 109–57, and Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*.

60. Looney interview; Rice, "Mama Rice," 3; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 166.
61. Branom interview.
62. Evans, Jernigin, Looney, Mathews, Roach, and Ryan interviews.
63. *Sears 1902 Catalogue*, 1154; *Sears, Roebuck, and Co. Consumer's Guide, 1909*, 861–974; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 136; McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990.
64. George interview; Ward interview.
65. Rice, "Mama Rice," 4; Mathews interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 136; Rice, "Mama Rice," 3.
66. "Cracklins" are crisp pork skin after the fat has been rendered (Rice, "Mama Rice," 3); George interview.
67. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 161–63; Bell, G. Jones, Lewis, McWhirter, Moxley, Thompson, and Thrasher interviews; Gray and McWhirter interviews.
68. McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990; Nicholson interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 153; Peoples interview.
69. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds*. A sizable portion of the farm interviewees specifically mentioned the "chicken peddler." Also known as "Raleigh men" or "Watkins men," these itinerants provided a market for women's production of chickens and eggs. See also Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 45 and 115–20.
70. Danner interview.
71. Rice, "Mama Rice," 3; Gray interview. Danner described an authoritarian grandfather who enjoyed dominating his children, grandchildren, and tenants (Danner interview).
72. Branom interview.
73. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 45.
74. E. G. Senter, *Farm and Ranch* 17 (Oct. 19, 1898), quoted in Sharpless, "Technology behind a Mule," 7–8; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 41.
75. Walsh Commission, 9040–41; Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 116; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 10.
76. Ward interview; Ewalt interview.
77. Danner interview; Washington interview; Branom, Cunningham, Hume, King, Moxley, Wallace, White, Bell, Washington, George, Jeter, G. Jones, Loftin, Thrasher, Ward, Peoples, and E. Williams interviews; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 102 and 186.
78. Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 118–20; William Owens, *Swing and Turn*, xv–xix.
79. Owens, *Swing and Turn*, xix. Many of the play party "dances" (Ownby calls them "Christian dances") were variants of square-dancing and the Virginia Reel. Owens, *Swing and Turn*, xv and xxviii; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 118–20; Thrasher interview.
80. Branom interview; Ward interview.
81. For more examples of visiting as pastime see Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 213–22, Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 190, and Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 111–16. Only two of the thirty-nine interviewees mentioned fathers who drank, and none mentioned mothers who drank alcohol. This may tell us, however, only that

the interviewees would have been embarrassed to discuss what they considered unacceptable behavior on the part of their parents. This would be especially true for church-going women, a group that dominated the set of interviewees.

82. Branom, Thrasher, Peoples, Moxley, Washington, McWhirter, and Jeter interviews. For revivals as entertainment, see Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 138.

83. Owens, *Swing and Turn*, xv–xxvii; Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 210. Rural evangelical southern churches disciplined their members more frequently for drinking, swearing, and dancing than any other lapses (Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 135).

84. Looney interview.

85. George and E. Williams interviews; Hume interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 138. On the place of hunting and fishing among the early-twentieth-century Texas plain folk, see Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 51–60.

86. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 26; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 38–40. G. L. Vaughan describes participating in an East Texas shivaree using the same “instruments” recalled by Owens (Vaughan, *Cotton Renter's Son*, 156).

87. Bell and Jeter interviews; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 122.

88. Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 144–45; Owens, *Swing and Turn*, xvii; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 122.

89. Tabernacles, large semi-open structures with walls that could be raised to allow in the breezes, replaced the older “brush arbor” of camp-meeting fame; however, Elizabeth Delk Roy, born in 1892 in Hunt County, remembered brush arbors in her childhood, flaming pine knots and all (Elizabeth Delk Roy, typed transcript of oral memoir, recorded Jan. 1979, Rantoul, Illinois, 5). “Campbellite” is the southern colloquial designation for adherents of the Church of Christ; Ward interview.

90. Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 157–58; Bell interview; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 176–77; Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 247–49; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 154–55.

91. Peoples interview; Wallace interview.

92. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 122; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 93.

93. Cunningham interview. Late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century American parents of one or two children would find it difficult to imagine the challenges involved in providing for families consisting of six to ten children. Christmas is one such example. It was not necessarily the cost of one toy that was so prohibitive but the cost of a half-dozen or more such toys. The 1902 *Sears Catalogue* lists toy “express” and “Farm” wagons ranging from \$1.20 to \$5.00; rocking horses could be had for fifty-eight cents each; a toy cooking range went for fifty cents; dolls ran from twenty-five cents to \$1.50; a wooden “Canary bird” whistle was four cents. Three of the cheapest toy wagons and three comparable dolls cost a family \$7.20; with a cheap gift each for the parents running the bill up to a \$10 total, a frugal farm family could spend close to 20 percent of a bale of cotton on Christmas (*Sears 1902 Catalogue*, 912–14). The most bountiful Christ-

mas chronicled by William Owens came as the result of an uncle taking a bale of cotton into the Lamar County seat of Paris “to get Christmas. . . . We knew by the way she said it that we could expect a good Christmas.” Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 72–73; Ewalt, Hume, McWhirter, Moxley, Wallace, and Washington interviews.

94. Washington interview.

95. Jeter interview; Peoples interview.

96. George interview.

97. Ward interview.

98. Looney interview.

99. McWhirter interview; J. Williams interview; Ward interview; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 71; G. Jones interview.

100. Hume interview; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 74; McWhirter and Hume interviews; Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 73–76; Hume interview.

101. G. Jones, Jernigin, and King interviews.

102. Hume interview.

Chapter 5. “The Same Class of People”

1. A rural Central Texan told oral historians Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley that in the early twentieth century, “fifteen miles down the road was like another land” (Sitton and Utley, *From Can See to Can’t*, 40). Randolph Campbell makes a good argument for the Texas county as community, and I follow that thinking in isolating economic data for Hunt County (Randolph B. Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis*). Saunders, “Ethnohistorical Research,”¹³; King and Rice interviews.

2. Henretta, “Families and Farms,” 6–7.

3. Washington interview; Gray interview.

4. Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 6 and 235–40.

5. Hyatt Cheek’s father—who was deaf—met an almost allegorical fate. He left his tenant farm during World War I because of the absence of his sons and his own advancing age and moved to Greenville, where he found work as a night watchman. The deaf night watchman was promptly run over and killed by a truck he could not hear approaching. On a mule-powered farm no such dangers accompanied hearing loss. Cheek interview.

6. In the “Introduction” to his novel *Walking on Borrowed Ground*, William Owens writes of a real-life Trinity River bottoms landlord who imported a pastor for his tenants’ church and “paid him well” to preach the gospel of “endur[ing] their hard life without complaint.” The landlord’s manager was there each Sunday morning to make certain “the preacher kept his bargain.” Owens, *Walking on Borrowed Ground*, xv.

7. Troy C. Crenshaw, *Texas Blackland Heritage*, 4.

8. *Delta County History, 1870–1991*, 245.

9. Ewalt, Gray, Bell, and Washington interviews; Walsh Commission, 9125.
10. Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 26, 28, 36, 37, 57, 59.
11. King interview; *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, May 26, 1905, 1; McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990; White interview; Walsh Commission, 9164.
12. Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 20 and 71.
13. Moxley interview; Sitton, *Harder than Hardscrabble*, 20.
14. The interviewees cited numerous examples of denominations sharing the church building and sometimes services. An example of this also occurs in the *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, May 26, 1905, 1. Since rural churches frequently had part-time preachers who preached every other Sunday, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians sometimes arranged schedules so that each could attend the others' sermons (Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 127–28).
15. William Allen interview. Interestingly, Wallace displayed no special bigotry toward blacks. Mirroring his statement on tenants in general, Wallace then said of local blacks, "They was just farm people like we was." Later comments would show his cordial relations with some in the black community (Wallace interview). For a full discussion of the rural poor majority's attachment to "whiteness," see Foley, *White Scourge*, 64–91.
16. Fletcher Warren treasured education as a youngster and eventually graduated as the valedictorian of his high school class and became a distinguished career diplomat, serving as U.S. ambassador to Turkey and several Latin American nations (Warren interview).
17. George interview; Jeter interview.
18. Ironically, Ferguson, a banker and town-dwelling landlord who adopted the political sobriquet "Farmer Jim," hardly fell into the category of small landlords he was applauding (Walsh Commission, 8958).
19. Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 265–69. The less work, the weaker the bond. Thus, a large landowning Wichita County farmer (560 acres), commented, "The laziness of renters is the chief cause of tenancy" (Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 69).
20. Moxley, Mathews, and Branom interviews; Walsh Commission, 9105.
21. Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 119; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 93; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 119–21; Hume interview; Washington interview; Howard, *Dorothy's World*, 115–18; Mathews and McCasland (Nov. 15, 1990) interviews; Lois Lacey Lewis, to the author, undated, 1990, original in possession of author.
22. Hume interview; Washington interview; Moxley interview; McWhirter interview; Roy, typed transcript of oral memoir, 11.
23. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 198; Washington interview; Peoples interview; Branom interview.
24. Hume interview. G. L. Vaughan remembers the "Christian-hearted" kindness of neighbors who nursed his Typhoid-stricken family, gathered the crops, slaughtered and put up pork, and sat up with the sick during the fall and winter of 1905. Both the Baptist congregation and the local Farmers' Union members organized the effort (Vaughan, *Cotton Renter's Son*, 103–104).

25. Roy, typed transcript of oral memoir, 11. “Standing good for his pay” was not just a figure of speech. Two Hill County physicians would not care for tenant farmers’ families without an assurance that the landowner would “stand good for it” (Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 46).

26. Hume interview; Loftin interview; Walsh Commission, 9124.

27. Peoples interview.

28. Garnett, *Some Socially Significant Rural Conditions*, 10.

29. Conrad and Sitton, *Freedom Colonies*.

30. Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans*, 65–67.

31. Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Back to Birmingham*, 6. For the centrality of “hard work” and “orthodox Christian faith” to plain folk culture, see Osthaus, “Work Ethic of the Plain Folk,” 745–82.

32. C. Vann Woodward, quoted in Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, xv; see also Westmacott, *African-American Gardens and Yards*.

The common adherence to evangelical Protestantism and a common set of agrarian ethics demonstrated commonality, as did some everyday behaviors. But church also embodied one significant difference that existed between these two peoples. Historian Albert J. Raboteau argues that not only was African American worship style clearly distinct but that the underlying system of beliefs differed from “white” Christianity, as well. This was especially true regarding black Christians’ rejection of the “place” conventional European American Christianity had historically assigned to them. Acknowledging these important differences should not, however, obscure the equally valid fact of black and white rural southerners’ cultural kinship. Even on the barren ground of slavery cultural exchange had taken place; these two peoples had lived together for too long for such exchanges not to have deeply influenced each race.

33. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 7, 9, 12, 177, and 187; W. E. B. Du Bois wrote of poor whites’ “psychological wage,” quoted in Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 12; Foley, *White Scourge*, 64–91.

34. In *White Scourge*, Neil Foley makes the good point that Mexican and Mexican American were categorized as white by the U.S. Census, thus obscuring the presence of this group among Texas farmers and tenants. But, as Foley and others have shown, the growth in the Mexican population in Texas came after 1910 and beyond the extent of this study (Foley, *White Scourge*, 1, 3, and 68).

35. *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, vol. 7, 665.

36. According to this study, U.S. blacks owned fifteen million acres of rural land in 1910 compared to five million in 1978 (Leo McGee and Robert Boone, eds., *The Black Rural Landowner—Endangered Species*, xv).

37. Manning Marable, “The Land Question in Historical Perspective: The Economics of Poverty in the Blackbelt South, 1865–1920,” in McGee and Boone, *Black Rural Landowner*, 12.

38. Merline Pitre, *Through Many Dangers, Toils, and Snares*, 195–205; *Handbook of Texas*, 292; Michael R. Heintze, *Private Black Colleges in Texas*, 41.
39. Alwyn Barr, “Black Legislators of Reconstruction Texas,” *Civil War History* 32 (4):347; Pitre, *Through Many Dangers*, 195–205; J. Mason Brewer, *Negro Legislators of Texas and Their Descendants*, 119–26; Barr, *Black Texans*, 71–80 and 90.
40. Conrad and Sitton, *Freedom Colonies*; Schweninger, *Black Property Owners*, 165.
41. Moore, “Andrew Hurdle,” A3.
42. A *Collection of Pages from the History of Neylandville and St. Paul School*, 9–14; “Neylandville, Texas,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/index.html>.
43. *Collection of Pages*, 11–15; *Handbook of Texas*.
44. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
45. Barr, *Black Texans*, 58.
46. Gray interview.
47. Ewalt, Jeter, and Evans interviews.
48. Ward interview; Loftin interview; Check interview.
49. Hume interview; Wallace interview.
50. McCasland interview, Nov. 15, 1990; McCasland interview, Nov. 20, 1990.
51. Starrett interview.
52. Washington interview.
53. Peoples interview.
54. *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, Oct. 16, 1908, 4.
55. Galloway Darby, Grand Saline merchant, interview; George W. Smith and Enoch Fletcher interviews; *Greenville (Tex.) Herald*, May 23, 1913, 1.
56. On the 1892 lynching, see Barr, *Black Texans*, 84–85; B. J. Langford, *A Conflagration of Souls*, 32–35 and 98–119; *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1908, 1; July 23, 1910, 1; May 16, 1916, 1; Jan. 21, 1919, 1; July 6, 1920, 1; *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, Aug. 18, 1905, 4; Hume, W. A. Caplinger, Starrett, Check, Lorraine Buchanan Jordan, and Smith interviews.
57. Myrna Gilstrap, granddaughter of friend to Greenville lynching victim, interview. The white oral tradition, while lacking in this detail, also maintained that no rape had occurred; Check, Rice, and Caplinger interviews.
58. *Dallas Morning News*, July 29, 1908, 1.
59. *Ibid.*
60. W. Walworth Harrison, *History of Greenville and Hunt County, Texas*, 386; Check and Caplinger interviews; Gilstrap interview; Harrison, *History of Greenville*, 386.
61. Barr, *Black Texans*, 84–85; Charles Spurgeon Johnson, ed., *Statistical Atlas of Southern Counties*, 225–42.
62. Gilstrap interview.
63. Owens, *Stubborn Soil*, 119–21.

64. W. Eugene Hollon, Hunt County resident 1913–34, “Growing Up in East Texas during the Depression,” Mar. 9, 1991, Fellows of the Association Address, Texas State Historical Association, Dallas, 2. Copy in Archives, James G. Gee Library, Teas A&M University–Commerce.

65. This study also showed that black tenants were more likely than whites to remain in one place but not by much (Woofter, *Black Migration*, 89).

66. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 46.

67. Thrasher interview.

68. Robert Lee Rice, “Some Highlights in the Life of Lee Rice,” unpublished manuscript, copy in Oral History Collection, James G. Gee Library, Texas A&M University–Commerce, 1–5; Hunt County Tax Roll, 1910, 287; Rice interview.

69. Rice interview.

70. Hunt County Tax Roll, 1910, 332; George interview.

71. George Interview.

72. Walsh Commission, 9005–42.

73. Ibid., 9005–14.

74. Ibid., 9014–15.

75. Ibid., 9015–20.

76. Ibid., 9020–24.

77. Ibid., 9024–27.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid., 9027–34.

81. Ibid., 9033.

82. Ibid., 9036–42.

83. As the number of banks grew in the 1910s, the status of credit merchants declined (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 63).

84. Hume interview.

85. By contrast, a McLennan County farmer-landlord observed of all tenants that the inability to buy their own land stemmed from their “inherent incapacity.” Thrasher interview; Lewis interview; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 52.

86. Walsh Commission, 8953–94.

87. Howard, *Dorothy’s World*, 170.

88. Ibid., 92–93 and 284.

89. McWhirter interview. For evangelical rural southerners the Sabbath was reserved for self-restrained quiet. Respectable church people were not supposed to engage in secular amusements, whether fishing or baseball, on Sunday (Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 107–109).

90. Belonging to a church helped weaken class differences, according to “cotton renter’s son” G. L. Vaughan. In early-twentieth-century Alabama he knew who the landowners were in his childhood congregation, but “none acted superior” (Vaughan, *Cotton Renter’s Son*, 78).

91. Walsh Commission, 9051.
92. Cheek interview.
93. Ryan interview; G. L. Vaughan quoted in James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 259; Vaughan, *Cotton Renter's Son*.
94. Walsh Commission, 9205–9206; C. W. Goff, “Looking Backward—A Reminiscence: County Officers and Lawyers Fifty Years Ago in Greenville,” clipping, March 21, 1931, in Hunt County Scrapbook, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.
95. Walsh Commission, 9207–9208.
96. *Ibid.*, 9208–10.
97. *Ibid.*, 9213, 9208.
98. *Texas Bankers' Record* 4 (June 1915): 92, cited in Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 311; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 30, 72.
99. *Ibid.*, 43, 47.
100. Walsh Commission, 8973–76; Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 73, 54–55; Walsh Commission, 8958–59.
101. Walsh Commission, 87, 8952.
102. Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 22, 53; Walsh Commission, 9262; George interview.
103. Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 29, 26–27.
104. Walsh Commission, 9015, 8994–97.
105. Charles B. Wilkison interview.
106. Walsh Commission, 9144–45, cited in Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 311.
107. Walsh Commission, 9262, 9263–64, 9036; *Rebel* (Hallettsville, Tex.), Sept. 30, 1911, 3.
108. Walsh Commission, 9102–13.
109. Walsh Commission, 9102 and 9124.
110. In reply to a question about the quality of housing on such bottom-land plantations he replied: “Bad generally; there are some men that have good houses for their tenants, but not many” (Walsh Commission, 9104–9105 and 9184).
111. The following day, after reflection and probably legal counsel, Padgitt adjusted his testimony and assured the Commission that he only fired tenants whose politics led them to neglect their crops (*Ibid.*, 9107–13).
112. George interview.
113. *Ibid.*
114. Robinson interview, 4–6.
115. Green, *Grass Roots Socialism*, 21; *Greenville (Tex.) Morning Herald*, Mar. 7, 1912, 1; Walsh Commission, 9184; *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, Aug. 18, 1905, 1.
116. Langford, *Conflagration of Souls*, 32–35; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 167–68. In *100 Years of Lynching*, compiler Ralph Ginzburg reproduces a clipping from the *New York Negro World* containing an anonymous letter from a black

Lamar County resident describing in detail the events surrounding the lynching. The letter writer testified that after the burning, members of the mob returned to the jail where the rest of the family was being held. “The three Arthur girls, aged 20, 17 and 14 . . . were taken to the basement, stripped of all their clothing and there assaulted by 20 white men, after which they were given a bucket of molasses, a small sack of flour and some bacon and told to hit the road.” “Letter from Texas Reveals Lynching’s Ironic Facts,” *New York Negro World*, Aug. 22, 1920, in Ralph Ginzburg, ed., *100 Years of Lynchings*, 139–40.

117. Walsh Commission, 9164.

118. *Ibid.*, 9166.

119. *Ibid.*, 9164.

Chapter 6. “The Land Shall Not Be Sold Forever”

1. *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, Nov. 18, 1910, 3, and Nov. 25, 1910, 1.

2. Saunders, “Ethnohistorical Research,” 13–14 and 21–22.

3. Vinson Syman, *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 60; Walter N. Vernon, *Methodism Moves across North Texas*, 144. Both the Baptist and Methodist categories included black and white congregations. The Southern (white) and National (black) Baptists were not distinguished in the census. While denominational names are by and large identifiable by race among Methodists, this was untrue in the case of some Congregational Methodist churches. For the sake of consistency I have lumped together black and white Methodists above. In reality, 9.4 percent of all Methodists belonged to one of the two identifiable black groups in Hunt County. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports, Religious Bodies: 1906*, 359–62; for a good summary of the general topic see David Edwin Harrell Jr., “The Evolution of Yeoman Religion in the South, 1835–1920,” in Samuel S. Hill, ed., *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience*, 24–51.

4. Lewis, McWhirter, McCasland (Nov. 15, 1990), Starrett, Warren, Rice, and Ward interviews.

5. R. B. Woods, “Religious Activity in Southern Travis County, Texas,” in Newell Leroy Sims, ed., *The Rural Community*, 420.

6. Nicholson and all other farm interviewees.

7. Owens, *This Stubborn Soil*, 171–78.

8. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*; Jimmie Lewis Franklin, “Black Southerners, Shared Experience, and Place: A Reflection,” *Journal of Southern History* 60 (Feb. 1994): 3–18; George N. Green, *Heart of the Metroplex*, 26–27 and 45–46; Washington, Peoples, and Gray interviews.

9. Woods, “Religious Activity,” 418.

10. Howard, *Dorothy’s World*, 123–28; Rice, “Mama Rice,” 5.

11. Walsh Commission, 9239.

12. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South*, 407–408; *Remonstrator* (Paris, Texas), Oct. 1919, 6.

13. *Baptist Standard* (Dallas, Texas), Aug. 26, 1904, 2; Vernon, *Methodism Moves across North Texas*, 151; Roach and Ryan interviews; Edmund Brunner, *Church Life in the Rural South*, 48.

14. Edward L. Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 399–408; Robert Mapes Anderson finds in the Pentecostal movement “a vast subculture . . . that is no less real simply because its outlines are obscure.” While Anderson sees Holiness groups as a protest movement of the “disinherited” against the social order, he believes they ultimately come to “perpetuate that order.” Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 7–9; Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South*, 407. Churches of Christ congregations rejected claims made by the Disciples of Christ of middle-class virtues. In turn, Disciples of Christ churches doubted the Christian virtues of their poorer former co-religionists. David E. Harrell, “Sectional Origins of the Churches of Christ,” *Journal of Southern History* 30 (Aug. 1974): 276.

15. Ward, Looney, McCasland (Nov. 15, 1990), and Warren interviews.

16. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 65, 139, and 171–75. For examples of the Christian socialism “propounded by urban preachers and other social gospelers,” see Jacob Dorn, ed., *Socialism and Christianity in Early 20th Century America*.

17. By 1912 Leviticus 25:23 (“the land shall not be sold forever . . .”) had attained the status of liturgy for Texas socialists. Those favoring total collectivization of the land especially liked it. During a floor debate at the Socialist Party’s 1912 convention in Indianapolis, the Rev. C. A. Byrd, of Beaumont, Texas, used the passage during his attack on the compromise land plank then under consideration. But almost all Texas Socialist Party of America (SPA) spokesmen and many of the rank and file, collectivist or not, commonly used the verse. *Proceedings of the Socialist Party of America National Convention, 1912*, in Socialist Party of America Papers, microfilm edition, reel 76, Special Collections, Library, University of North Texas, Denton; *Rebel*, Nov. 25, 1911, 1, and Aug. 19, 1911, 1; Roscoe C. Martin, *The People’s Party in Texas*, 165–69; McMath, *American Populism*, 152–53.

18. Hickey to fiancée Clara Boeer, July 12, 1910, folder 10; Hickey to Boeer, Aug. 3, 1911, folder 17; Hickey to Boeer, Feb. 1, 1911, folder 9, box 1; undated debate flyer, folder 25, box 2, Hickey Papers, 1896–1996 and undated, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas; G. A. T. to Hickey, July 6, 1911, folder 17, box 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock.

19. John E. Hardie to Hickey, Dec. 29, 1912, folder 17, box 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock.

20. Jim Bissett conclusively demonstrates the decisive role played by the common people themselves in the formation of the Socialist Party in Oklahoma in *Agrarian Socialism in America*.

21. Hunt County Manuscript Census, 1900, 297; Vernon, *Methodism Moves*

across North Texas, 198 and 393–406; *Commerce Journal*, Dec. 16, 1910, 1; Gene Forst, “Texas Socialism,” (unpublished paper, University of North Texas, 1984), 20; *Commerce Journal*, Nov. 8, 1901, 1; *Wills Point Chronicle*, Dec. 3, 1903 (clipping, no page number).

22. M. A. Smith, “How I Became a Socialist,” *The Pitchfork* (Dallas, Texas), Jan. 1911, 9; Morgan A. Smith, *Socialism in Song*, 4, 11, and 27.

23. Smith meant “The End of Tenancy,” of course, not “Tenantry.” Smith, *Socialism in Song*, 9, 11, 18, 33, and 57.

24. *Pitchfork*, Nov. 1911: 3; *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 588.

25. *Baptist Standard*, Feb. 22, 1900, 8; Hunt County Baptist Association, “Minutes of the Hunt Baptist Association, 1911” (Microfilm edition, Southern Baptist Historical Archives, Nashville, Tennessee), 29.

26. J. R. Barrett, “An Article on Land Ownership,” *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, Nov. 18, 1910, 3.

27. Slaughter’s biographer states that while “Slaughter was never a colonel, his friends and acquaintances, in Southern fashion, rewarded his rapid rise to wealth by referring to him by that title.” David J. Murrah, *C. C. Slaughter*, 30; Smith, “Ownership of Land,” *Commerce Journal*, Nov. 25, 1910, 1.

28. Barrett, “Reply from J. R. Barrett,” *Commerce Journal*, Dec. 2, 1910, 1.

29. Smith, “Ownership of Lands, II,” *Commerce Journal*, Dec. 9, 1910, 1.

30. Ibid.; Ernest W. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas, 1846–1916*, 566; Green, *Grass Roots Socialism*, 236–37.

31. *Commerce Journal*, Dec. 9, 1910, 1.

32. Barrett, “Barrett Replies to Smith Again,” *Commerce Journal*, Dec. 16, 1910, 1.

33. Joshua L. Hicks Papers, box 1, folder 228–1–1, folder 228–1–2, scrapbook 2, folder 228–1–3, scrapbook 1, 219 and 233, Louis H. Hicks Collection, Texas Labor History Archives, Special Collections, Central Library, The University of Texas at Arlington; *Rebel*, June 2, 1911, 1.

34. Hicks lectured Cranfill over Cranfill’s warning northern prohibitionists not to attempt to “break down” the “color line” in the South and Cranfill’s assertion that prohibitionist appeals to blacks were wasted because of blacks’ racial inferiority. Hicks demanded that Cranfill consider “how like a wet blanket such language must fall upon the ardent zeal” of black prohibitionists. J. L. Hicks and J. B. Cranfill clippings, box 1, folder 228–1–3, scrapbook 1, 153–57, Hicks Collection. Hicks attacked Abilene preachers for their support of the Spanish-American War. He professed disgust for ministers who used inflammatory oratory before audiences of young men, potential recruits, “calculated to kindle the fires of patriotism and arouse the military spirit.” Hicks preached a primitive Christianity resonating with Holiness influence. True believers “must quit the ways of the world and follow the ways of Christ. And if we follow the ways of Christ we cannot kill our fellow-man in war, or seek to govern them except through the law and love of charity.” J. L. Hicks, *Christianity, War, and Politics*, 2, 10 and 20.

35. J. L. Hicks Papers, box 1, folder 228–1–2, scrapbook, 19–23 and 161, Louis Hicks Collection.

36. Hopkins Countians defeated the 1888 fence law (called “stock law”) by a ten-to-one margin. Hicks, “The Hog Law and the Renter” and “The Stock Law Election,” Hicks Papers, scrapbook no. 1, 111–13, box 1, file 228–1–3, Hicks Collection.

37. J. L. Hicks Papers, box 1, folder 228–1–3, scrapbook 1, 276–77 and 301, Hicks Collection.

38. Hicks, “Ferguson and His ‘Third and Fourth,’” *Rebel*, June 24, 1916), J. L. Hicks Papers, scrapbook no. 1, 298, box 1, file 228–1–3, Hicks Collection; J. L. Hicks, *The Scout* (Hallettsville, Texas), Sept. 1911, 4; Hicks, “Decided to Try Next World,” clipping of letter to the editor of *Union Standard*, no date or city, J. L. Hicks Papers, scrapbook no. 1, 235, Hicks Papers, box 1, file 228–1–3, Hicks Collection.

39. Vernon, *Methodism Moves across North Texas*, 143–44; Syman, *Holiness Pentecostal Movement*, 61, 57–58. Charles E. Jones argues against an economic class explanation of the Holiness phenomenon. He asserts instead that urban Holiness adherents were members of the middle class and skilled working class nostalgic for their rural, camp-meeting, Methodist roots. For them the Holiness movement represented “cultural continuity.” Charles Edwin Jones, “Disinherited or Rural? A Historical Case Study in Urban Holiness Religion,” *Missouri Historical Review* 66 (Apr. 1972): 395–412.

40. This particular group formed the nucleus of the future Church of the Nazarene, a non-Pentecostal denomination. In 1920 Peniel’s Holiness University moved to Oklahoma City and was eventually renamed Bethany College. Vernon, *Methodism Moves across North Texas*, 144–49; Hunt County Tax Rolls, 1910, 268; Jones, “Disinherited or Rural?” 407; *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, Sept. 24, 1898, 2.

41. Vernon, *Methodism Moves across North Texas*, 144–48. While Anderson sees Holiness sects as a religion of the poor, others dispute this interpretation. See Jones, “Disinherited or Rural?” 395–412.

42. Green, *Grass Roots Socialism*, 164.

43. *Ibid.*, 65 and 300. Holman had been active in Texas for at least six years (*International Socialist Review* 7 (1908): 723).

44. Walsh Commission, 9263–64.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Rebel*, Mar. 14, 1914, 2; William F. Lemmons, *The Evils of Socialism*, 3 and 64. Lemmons had reason to worry. One of the five first Socialists elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives was Thomas McLemore, a Beckham County dirt farmer and Church of Christ preacher. Von Russell Creel, “Socialists in the House: The Oklahoma Experience, Part I,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 70 (1992): 144–83.

47. Loftin interview; Rains County Election Report, filed with the Texas Secretary of State, Nov. 1912, Texas State Library and Archives, Austin.

48. Hume interview. From his contact with the Tira Socialists Hume believed that Socialists disapproved of the idea of taxation. Coincidentally, in 1893 a family named McCuller had lost their land in the Tira area for non-payment of property taxes. Saunders, "Ethnohistorical Research," 17.

49. A "big reader" himself, the elder McCasland sought to provide educational opportunities for his children and stepchildren, observing that education was the one thing "they can never take away from you." He took advantage of East Texas Normal College's flexible tuition policy by paying for three of his children's education with livestock from the farm. Perhaps McCasland entrusted his offspring's education to the nearby school because of its Intercollegiate Socialist Society chapter, which M. A. Smith had organized on campus, as well as the presence of at least one socialist faculty member. Apparently only one of his sons followed his father's political lead, however. Forst, "Texas Socialism," 30; *Rebel*, Feb. 22, 1913, 1; "Socialism in Song: What They Say of It," *Pitchfork* (clipping, n.d., copy in author's possession courtesy of G. L. Seligmann, University of North Texas), 5; McCasland interview, Nov. 20, 1990.

50. W. E. Sherwood to John C. Granbery, Jan. 3, 1915, box 2P378, John C. Granbery Papers, Center for American History, the University of Texas, Austin.

51. Peteet, *Farming Credit*, 77, 62.

52. J. H. Marshall, Lamesa, Dawson County, Texas, to E. R. Meitzen, in the Meitzen Exhibit, Walsh Commission, 9261; S. D. Lee, Smiley, Texas, to Meitzen, Walsh Commission, 9261; J. R. Goodgame, Hamlin, Fisher County, Texas, to Meitzen, Walsh Commission, 9262; E. G. Bogard, Winters, Runnels County, Texas, to Meitzen, Walsh Commission, 9265; Lewis Jones, Trout, Texas, to Meitzen, Walsh Commission, 9266; A. C. Walker, Baird, Callahan County, Texas, to Meitzen, Walsh Commission, 9267.

53. "Letter of Acceptance," *The Farmers Journal* (Abilene, Tex.), Oct. 12, 1910, 1, scrapbook 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock.

54. Travis L. Summerlin, "Reddin Andrews: The Last President of Baylor at Independence" (manuscript), Reddin Andrews, "M. T. Martin and His Accusers" (clipping, Aug. 1889), Reddin Andrews, *Essay: The Baptists and Liberty* (Austin: Texas Baptist Herald Print, 1884), 3–4, all in Reddin Andrews Papers, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Martin, *People's Party*, 79.

55. Forst, "Texas Socialism," 19–20; *Rebel*, July 1, 1911, 1.

56. *Farmers Journal* (Abilene, Tex.), Oct. 12, 1910, 1, scrapbook 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock.

57. Granbery to Bishop Seth Ward, Aug. 6, 1907; Thomas Lipscomb to Granbery, Sept. 27, 1913; G. C. Rankin to Granbery, Dec. 29, 1913, box 2P378, Granbery Papers.

58. John C. Granbery, "The Land Problem in Texas and the Remedies Proposed," *Survey* 32 (July 1914): 395.

59. Walsh Commission, 9127–28; Granbery to C. B. Fillebrown, June 10, 1914, box 2P378, Granbery Papers; Edwin A. Hunter to Granbery, Nov. 30, 1914, and Granbery to J. L. Cuninggin, Dec. 19, 1914, box 2P378, Granbery Papers.

60. Vernon, *Methodism Moves across North Texas*, 406; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 169; *Rebel*, Sept. 2, 1911, 1; *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: 1911*, 120; *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: 1912*, 115.

61. Murrah, *C. C. Slaughter*, 124–25, 132; *Standard*, May 9, 1901, 3; May 16, 1901, 4; Dec. 12, 1901, 1; Jan. 11, 1900, 4.

62. *Standard*, Jan. 11, 1900, 1; June 6, 1912, 25; Harrell, “Sectional Origins,” 273–74. A North Carolina denominational newspaper expressed the logical conclusion of this line of thinking when it asserted that “poverty resulted ‘directly or indirectly from some transgression of divine law.’” Frederick Bode, “Religion and Class Hegemony: A Populist Critique in North Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History* 37 (Aug. 1971): 425.

63. *Rebel*, Apr. 6, 1912, 1.

64. Lemmons, *Evils of Socialism*, 68; *Firm Foundation*, Feb. 13, 1912, 6.

65. Lemmons, *Evils of Socialism*, 4–5, 8–9, 12–13, 16, 29–30, 31–32, 35, 40–42, and 76–86.

66. *Ibid.*, 12–15, 40–41, and 63.

67. *Ibid.*, 49, 51–52, 57, 69–70, and 88.

68. *Ibid.*, 21 and 76–86.

69. *Ibid.*, 66–67; *Rebel*, Mar. 14, 1914, 2.

70. *Gospel Advocate* (Nashville, Tennessee), July 17, 1913, 691.

71. *Rebel*, July 25, 1911, 4; *Greenville (Tex.) Morning Herald*, May 2, 1912, 6.

Chapter 7. “Whose Planet Is This Anyway?”

1. *Rebel*, Sept. 2, 1911, 4.

2. The American yeomanry’s moral standards for land ownership appeared in articulated form only sporadically and locally as circumstances demanded as in the cases of the colonial Regulator movements in the Carolinas, Shays’ Rebellion in early national Massachusetts, or the Anti-Rent Wars of antebellum New York. See Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); David Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Thomas Summerhill, *Harvest of Dissent: Agrarianism in Central New York in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

3. Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 38–175.

4. Oklahoma farmers educated their Socialist leadership on the land issue as well (Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism*, 58–84).

5. Granger opposition to the poll tax should not be misunderstood as solidarity with African Americans. According to at least one study Grangers “invariably opposed black aspirations” (Dale Baum and Robert A. Calvert, “Texas Patrons of Husbandry: Geography, Social Contexts and Voting Behavior,” *Agricultural History* 63 [1989]: 36–55).

6. Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 3–38. For the course of Texas politics from “Redemption” through the poll tax, see Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 3–208.

7. Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 44–62; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 180.

8. Barr, 63–76; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 180, 206.

9. *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 587; *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 11; “Hunt County Election Records, 1882–1904,” Book 2, 1. Hereafter cited as Book 2.

10. Book 2, 1 and 11; *General Highway Map, Hunt County, Texas*; Harrison, *History of Greenville*, 169; E. H. Templin and R. M. Marshall, *Soil Survey, Hunt County, Texas*.

11. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 33–50; McMath, *American Populism*, 50–82; Martin, *People's Party*, 23.

12. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 284–85; Book 2, 23.

13. See especially the debate over the meaning of fence laws in Shawn Everett Kantor and J. Morgan Kousser, “Common Sense or Commonwealth? The Fence Law and Institutional Change in the Postbellum South,” with a response from Steven Hahn and a rejoinder by Kantor and Kousser, *Journal of Southern History* 59 (May 1993): 201–66; Shawn Everett Kantor, *Politics and Property Rights*; mentioned briefly in Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 71; Buenger believes viewing the fence law controversy and other such measures as class conflict “obscures as much as it reveals” (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 117–18).

14. John A. Caplen, “Camp Big Thicket: Life in the Piney Woods,” in F. E. Abernethy, ed., *Tales From the Big Thicket* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 112, quoted in Thad Sitton, “No Dogs, No Logs: Common Rights and Forest Arson in Rural Southeastern Texas,” presented at the spring 1994 meeting of the East Texas Historical Association Meeting, 2; also see chapter 7, “Closing the Woods,” in Thad Sitton, *Backwoodsmen*.

15. Sitton, *Backwoodsmen*, 3–4.

16. Book 2, 32.

17. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 140–41; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 256; Martin, *People's Party*, 79.

18. V. O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 262; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 258.

19. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 141–42; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 261–73; *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 586–88; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 278.

20. "Aimed at the Cotton Trust," *New York Times*, Aug. 26, 1888, 2; Book 2, 34.
21. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 221–22. Dewey Grantham writes that Hogg sought the "middle course" between radical Populism and the conservative wing of the Democratic Party (Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 99); Book 2, 45; Martin, *People's Party*, 25–26;
22. After the internecine bloodletting associated with William Jennings Bryan's 1896 fusion candidacy, the Texas People's Party faded with amazing speed. By 1898 the thinning ranks of party leadership pinned their hopes on a proposed state-built "relief railroad" as a panacea for the hard-pressed farmer's economic woes (Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 296–97, 315, 381, and 396–400). Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 493–514.
23. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 329–30; Martin, *People's Party*, 116–17; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 301; *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 587; Robert C. Cotner, *James Stephen Hogg*, 479–83.
24. Originally named Massey School, railroad officials renamed this community to honor one of their own after the arrival of rails in 1887. Fred Tarpley, *Place Names of Northeast Texas*, 112; Crenshaw, *Texas Blackland Heritage*, 50.
25. Indeed, Walter L. Buenger believes that "in a fair election Nugent probably would have finished ahead" of his Democratic rival in Northeast Texas in 1894 (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 27).
26. Book 2, 60 and 70; *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, Nov. 20, 1896, 1, and Nov. 11 1898, 2; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 81–83; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 493–514.
27. Historian Walter L. Buenger questions whether a majority of the voters—at least in Northeast Texas—actually approved the poll tax. Rather than rely on "the apathy and disorganization of their opponents, reformers [poll tax supporters] used widespread fraud and intimidation to secure passage of the poll tax" (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 89).
28. Although white Populists were somewhat sympathetic to blacks' untenable political situation, Miller implies that they believed black votes, or at least the fraudulent use of black names on voter lists, were used to bolster Democratic totals in contested areas. Thus, progressive Texas Democrats, seeking a winning coalition against conservative Democrats, "astutely presented the poll tax to Populists as a purification of the ballot." Having thus cleansed the process through the poll tax and the primary election law, the new coalition was able to elect a progressive governor, Hogg Democrat Thomas M. Campbell, and a progressive legislature in 1906 whose reform measures eclipsed even that of the Hogg years. J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*; Wilbur E. Benton, *Texas*, 82. Miller is persuasive when listing the Hogg Democrats who led the poll tax to fruition (Worth R. Miller, "Building a Progressive Coalition in Texas: The Populist Reform Democrat Rapprochement, 1900–1907," *Journal of Southern History* 52 [May 1986]: 172–73). Grantham writes that the black population was too small for "the race question" to "assume great importance"

in Texas. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 98, 101–102; Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics*, 20–25; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 86–87.

29. Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 203–206; Davidson, *Race and Class*, 20–25; Miller, “Building a Progressive Coalition,” 172–73.

30. *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, Nov. 20, 1896, 1; Book 2, 25, 122, 154; “Hunt County Election Records, 1882–1904,” Book 3, 9, 25, hereafter cited as Book 3; *Thirteenth Census: Population*, vol. 3, 827; Hunt County Manuscript Census, 1910, part 2, 1–16.

31. Book 2, 25, 154; Book 3, 9, 25; *Thirteenth Census: Population*, 827; Hunt County Manuscript Census, 1910, part 2, 1–16.

32. Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 229–42. At the state Democratic convention, Hunt County’s state representative, B. Q. Evans, supported the gubernatorial hopes of conservative Dallas judge M. M. Brooks, a former Greenville attorney and absentee-landlord. Evans came home complaining of “Populist” support for Campbell and claimed to have encountered that movement’s half-dead corpse at the state Democratic convention. He derided the former Populists, poked fun at their country appearance and old-fashioned whiskers, but mostly was annoyed by their support of Campbell. *Wolfe City (Tex.) Sun*, Sept. 7, 1906, 1 (Texas Newspaper Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin).

33. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 103.

34. Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865–1933*, 184, 187–88; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 101; Robert L. Hunt, *A History of Farmer Movements in the Southwest, 1873–1925*, 100.

35. Hunt, *History of Farmer Movements*, 65–66.

36. *Ibid.*, 61, 69 and 74; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 101.

37. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 64.

38. Hunt, *History of Farmer Movements*, 70.

39. With the increasing number of rural banks, by the 1910s only the poorest rural people had to patronize credit merchants (Buenger, *Path to the Modern South*, 61 and 63).

40. Hunt, *History of Farmer Movements*, 84, 123–25.

41. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 64; Hunt, *History of Farmer Movements*, 143; Saloutos, 192–94, 203, and 212; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 53–54 and 120–21; Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism*, 40–58; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 119.

42. Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897–1912*, 8–12, 17–24, 43–62; Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism*, 388; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 19.

43. Nominated by the Socialists for the Texas State Supreme Court, the closest Meitzen got was his election as county judge of Lavaca County. He and his son were the only German-Texans in the party’s leadership; their ethnicity won few votes for socialism, however, in spite of the large concentration of German-speaking Central Texans. The “German counties” voted for Repub-

licans and “wet” Democrats throughout the period. Meitzen whimsically described his limited success in local politics by observing that he was elected county judge in 1904 “by accident” when he “slipped up on the blind side of the politicians.” By that he meant that, despite his ex-Populist status, he ran in and won a hotly contested Democratic primary and served the 1905–1907 term as the Lavaca County judge. The angry Democratic County Commissioners retaliated by seeking to have his salary reduced by 80 percent. In 1914 Meitzen was shot and wounded by the Hallettsville City Marshall during a confrontation on the courthouse steps. Meitzen described it this way: “Last summer I intended to better conditions in my town and go after a grafter who had stolen \$12,000 and he liked to have killed me. He shot me. The people always said I was half shot, but this time I was shot clear through.” *The Shiner Gazette*, Apr. 13, 1904, 4; May 25, 1904, 5; June 1, 1904, 8; June 15, 1904, 4; June 29, 1904, 4; July 6, 1904, 5; July 20, 1904, 4; *Cuero Daily Record*, Dec. 14, 1904 (clipping); Walsh Commission, 9142; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 256–57, 273–75, 298, 301, 314, 332, 380, 397, 418, 420, 442–44, 552, and 564; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 19–23. Seth S. McKay shows Meitzen receiving less than 2 percent of the German counties’ vote in 1914 (McKay, *Texas Politics, 1906–1944*, 59).

44. Book 2, 122; *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, Nov. 16, 1900, 2; *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 587; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 442.

45. No anti-Socialist propaganda went unchallenged in Van Zandt County. The county’s Socialists charged Democrats with falsely averring that “Socialism stands for the abolishment of the state, church and home” and challenged the omnipresent W. F. Lemmons (of *The Evils of Socialism* fame) to “divide time” with a local Socialist representative. Declared the local Socialist Executive Committee, “The man who has truth on his side has nothing to fear from a fair debate.” In keeping with this, in Lee Rhodes’s 1912 campaign for state representative he “respectfully invited” his Democratic opponent to share the stage with him at “any or all” of his scheduled appearances. Fletcher interview; *Grand Saline (Tex.) Sun*, Dec. 28, 1911, 1; Jan. 4, 1912, 1; Oct. 17, 1912, 1, 2. Not all communities shared Van Zandt County’s complacent view of their local socialists. In 1908 the mayor of the East Texas town of Longview argued with a socialist speaker “about blockading the sidewalks” during an oration. Apparently the socialist refused to move, “which resulted in the mayor throwing a rock at the speaker.” *Grand Saline (Tex.) Sun*, June 9, 1908, 2.

46. *Grand (Tex.) Saline Sun*, July 27, 1911, 2; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 564; *The Southland* (Waco, Tex.) 12, no. 1 (1904): 13; *Alba (Tex.) Vanguard*, Aug. 18, 1904, 1; *The Pitchfork* (Dallas, Tex.), Sept. 1911, 1–7. Copies of *The Pitchfork* in author’s possession courtesy of G. L. Seligmann, University of North Texas.

47. Smith interview; *Wills Point (Tex.) Chronicle*, July 8, 1909; July 13, 1911; May 16, 1912; Aug. 8, 1912; *Grand Saline (Tex.) Sun*, July 13, 1911, 6; Aug. 19, 1915; Smith interview; Fletcher interview; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 153–58; Wil-

liam C. Pratt, "Socialism on the Northern Plains, 1900-1924," *South Dakota History* 18 (1988): 1-35; Creel, "Socialists in the House," 144-83; H. L. Meredith, "Oscar Ameringer and the Concept of Agrarian Socialism," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 45 (1967): 77-83.

48. *Our Heritage* (Canton, Texas), Feb. 1990, 37; *The Southland* (Waco, Tex.) 12, no. 1 (1904): 13; Socialist Party of America Papers, *Proceedings of the Socialist Party of America Convention, 1908* (Microfilm edition, reel 76, Special Collections, Library, University of North Texas, Denton); Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 15, 38, 56; *Grand Saline (Tex.) Sun*, Jan. 2, 1908, 2; Feb. 8, 1908, 4; Oct. 17, 1912, 1.

49. Alexander and Constable L. M. Vincent were elected by the voters of Grand Saline and the communities of Fruitvale and Sand Flat. In 1912 the Van Zandt County Socialists had a candidate in every local contest from state representative to constable. *Grand Saline (Tex.) Sun*, Jan. 5 1911, 5; Jan. 4, 1912, 1; Oct. 17, 1912, 1 and 10; Nov. 14, 1912, 1; Fletcher interview; Smith interview; *Rebel*, July 1, 1911, 2.

50. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 470-72; *Alba (Tex.) Vanguard*, Mar. 4, 1905, 1; *Texas Almanac, 1984*, 587; Book 2, 154.

51. *Alba (Tex.) Vanguard*, Mar. 4, 1905, 1, Aug. 18, 1904, 1.

52. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 484-85.

53. *Texas Almanac, 1984*, 587; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 483-85; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 138.

54. Book 3, 1.

55. SPA Papers, *Proceedings, 1908*; Kipnis, *American Socialist Movement*, 218; Forst, "Texas Socialism," 13-14; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 79-80.

56. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 513; *Texas Almanac, 1984*, 587; Book 3, 9.

57. Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism*, 61-69.

58. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 527-29; Forst, "Texas Socialism," 17-18.

59. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 528-29.

60. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 424, 546; Forst, "Texas Socialism," 19.

61. *Texas Almanac, 1984*, 587; Book 3, 20; *Greenville (Tex.) Morning Herald*, July 24, 1910, 3.

62. *Texas Almanac, 1984*, 587; *Grand Saline (Tex.) Sun*, Jan. 5, 1911, 6.

63. *Rebel*, July 1, 1911, 1.

64. See Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 136-43; *Rebel*, July 1, 1911, 2; *Time*, July 24, 1939, 38-39; *Pitchfork*, Sept. 1911, 1, Oct. 1914, 1.

65. *Rebel*, Jan. 1, 1912, 1, and May 25, 1912, 2.

66. *Pitchfork*, June 1911, 1.

67. For Debs on racial equality and the class struggle see Joseph M. Bernstein, ed., *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, 63-66 and 66-73; for one ex-

ample of Hickey's racial rhetoric see *Pitchfork*, June 1911, 1; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 94–114; for an in-depth discussion of Hickey and Texas Socialists on racial attitudes, particularly toward Mexican Americans, see Foley, *White Scourge*, 93–113. For a well-written comparison of racial issues between the *Rebel* and a Socialist paper in Memphis, see Stephen Burwood, "The South: Segregation, Sex and Socialism before World War One," *Borderlines: Studies in American Culture* [Great Britain] 5 (1998): 126–41.

68. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 94–115; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 485, 528, and 567; J. L. Hicks and J. B. Cranfill clippings, box 1, folder 228–1–3, scrapbook 1, 153–57, Hicks Collection; Garin Burbank conclusively shows the strong and consistent anti-Klan activism in Socialist precincts in Oklahoma (Garin Burbank, "Agrarian Radicals and Their Opponents," *Journal of American History* 58 [June 1971]: 5–30). Oklahoma Socialists had a better record on race in part because of the anti-racist leadership of Oscar Ameringer (Meredith, "Agrarian Socialism and the Negro in Oklahoma," 277–84).

69. Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 101–102. Oklahoma tenants organized their Renters' Union two years before the Falls County local was born. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 81; *Rebel*, Sept. 2, 1911, 1; Nov. 25, 1911, 1.

70. Hickey to Clara Boeer, Aug. 3, 1911, box 1, folder 17, Hickey Papers, Lubbock; Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 128.

71. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 549–50.

72. E. O. Meitzen, "Relief Asked for Tenant Farmers," *Houston Daily Post*, Aug. 24, 1914, clipping in folder 22, box 2, Hickey Papers, Lubbock.

73. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 110–15; undated flyer, "Hickey Lecture," folder 23, box 2, Hickey Papers, Lubbock; Foley, *White Scourge*, 106–12.

74. Debs to Hickey, folder 13, box 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock.

75. *New York Times*, May 12, 1912, C12, May 18, 1912, 7 and 12. At least seven of Texas' dozen delegates were North Texans, including M. A. Smith of Hunt, Jake and Lee Rhodes and Richey Alexander of Van Zandt, George Edwards of Dallas, and J. C. Thompson and Belle Williams of Bowie County. The others included W. S. Noble of Milam, Ernest Meitzen and Tom Hickey of Lavaca, C. A. Byrd of Jefferson, and Ed Green, Hickey's ally from Milam County (SPA Papers, *Proceedings of the National Convention*, 1912).

76. SPA Papers, *Proceedings of the National Convention*, 1912; *Rebel*, July 1, 1911, 1.

77. *New York Times*, May 17, 1912, 6, May 18, 1912, 7; SPA Papers, *Proceedings of the National Convention*, 1912; Kipnis, *American Socialist Movement*, 253–55, 400; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 17–18, 218; Forst, "Texas Socialism," 26.

78. Sally Miller writes that O'Hare was the first nationally known socialist to point out that economic oppression often led to domestic repression, that the abused farmer sometimes took his frustrations out on his wife and children (Sally M. Miller, "Other Socialists: Native Born and Immigrant Women in the Socialist Party of America, 1901–1917," *Labor History* 24 [winter 1983]: 89); SPA

Papers, *Proceedings of the National Convention, 1912*; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 238.

79. SPA Papers, *Proceedings of the National Convention, 1912*.

80. Ibid. On the Oklahoma land debate see Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism*, 181–83.

81. SPA Papers, *Proceedings of the National Convention, 1912*, Kipnis, *American Socialist Movement*, 218.

82. Not everyone agreed with decentralization. Prominent American socialist writer, critic, and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People William English Walling complained to Hickey that “your plan provides for freedom in Texas and a few other states, but for tyranny in Wisconsin, California, etc.” (Walling to Hickey, no date, folder 13, box 1 Hickey Papers, Lubbock).

83. At Waco SPA delegates selected ex-Church of Christ preacher W. S. Noble to chair the state executive committee and the convention. Joining him on the executive committee were, among others, Greenville feed store owner C. E. Obenchain and Stephenville lawyer Clarence Nugent, son of the beloved Populist leader Thomas Nugent (Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 564). *Rebel*, July 1, 1911, 2; Jan. 1, 1912, 1; May 25, 1912, 2; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, 101–102; “Socialists of Texas in Session Here,” *Waco (Tex.) Daily Times Herald*, Aug. 13, 1912, 3; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 565.

84. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 565; *Rebel*, 1 July 1911, 1.

85. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 565.

86. *Dallas Morning News*, Aug. 14, 1912, 1; Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties*, 564.

87. *Rebel*, July 6, 1912, 3.

88. Hickey to E. R. Meitzen, Mar. 21, 1912, folder 13, box 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock; *Rebel*, July 13, 1912, 3; July 30, 1912, 8; Sept. 28, 1912, 3; Oct. 5, 1912, 4; Oct. 12, 1912, 2; Oct. 26, 1912, 1; Walsh Commission, 9110–11; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 149–50, 220, 229, 232; Forst, “Texas Socialism,” 28.

89. *Rebel*, July 15, 1911, 1; Sept. 7, 1912, 1; Sept. 14, 1912, 1; Sept. 28, 1912, 2; Nov. 2, 1912, 4; Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 262–84.

90. Kipnis, *American Socialist Movement*, 15–17, 203–204, 206, 213, 307; Ginger, *Bending Cross*, 307.

91. *Rebel*, Sept. 14, 1912, 1.

92. *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 10–22.

93. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 249. On tactics used to keep middle-class dominance in the cities, see Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 252–53.

94. *Texas Election Records, Returns of an Election Held November 5, 1912* (Microfilm reel 18, Texas State Library and Archives, Archives Division, Lorenzo de Zavalla Building, Austin); *Texas Almanac, 1984*, 587.

95. No statistically significant relationship existed between the Socialist vote in the region and a ninety-eight-variable collection of economic, agricultural,

and demographic data. The strongest correlation coefficients are interesting, however, in their confirmation that on the county level the percentage voting Socialist bore its strongest positive relationships with variables indicative of the East Texas plain folk community (percent of potential electorate native-born white = .4129, illiteracy rates among native whites = .4057, and percent of farm acres in sweet potatoes = .3256.) This does not show that native-born white illiterates with a taste for sweet potatoes supported socialism at a greater rate than other groups. It does demonstrate, however, a positive relationship between East Texas plain folk characteristics and Socialist voting. Moreover, the strongest negative correlations between SPA percentages (tenancy rates = -.3610, average farm values = -.3459, and bales of cotton per farm = -.3218) does not show that cotton tenants tended to vote for parties other than the SPA at a higher rate than other groups. Instead, this rough measure simply indicates that on the county level, as tenancy rates went up the percentage of Socialist votes tended to go down. The countywide Socialist percentages in the cotton counties, with their large town electorates, did not reflect how rural people voted. Only an examination of precinct returns can shed light on how the plain folk community voted. Here, Hunt County's location is especially beneficial in offering a sample of blackland and mixed soil voting behavior (*Texas Almanac*, 1914, 54–58; *Texas Election Records*, 1912 (reel 18); *Thirteenth Census: Population*, 804–50; *Thirteenth Census: Agriculture*, 632–700; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 229).

96. *Greenville (Tex.) Morning Herald*, May 2, 1912, 6.

97. The Anti-Saloon League rally featured Rev. G. C. Rankin (*Texas Christian Advocate*) and Rev. J. B. Grambrell (*Baptist Standard*) of Dallas (*Morning Herald*, Mar. 6, 1912, 7).

98. *Ibid.*, Apr. 23, 1912, 3; Apr. 27, 1912, 3; May 2, 1912, 6.

99. Rayburn also was typical in his contradictory political leanings. Joseph W. Bailey was his inspiring boyhood model, and for a while young Rayburn remained an awed supporter. As Bailey's conservatism became more and more apparent, the generally progressive Rayburn found his ideology at odds with his loyalty (Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn*, 3–5, 12–28); Hunt County Tax Roll, 1910, 259.

100. McCasland interview, Nov. 20, 1990.

101. Book 3, 25.

102. *Ibid.*

103. In early 1912 the Greenville city tax assessor reported that 1,520 poll taxes had been paid out of 1,567 assessed. The *Morning Herald* estimated that, counting poll tax exemptions, the Greenville electorate consisted of 1,800 persons. The Hunt County tax collector reported that 8,009 poll taxes had been collected countywide. Because of the predominant position of the Democratic primary, and the assumption that "the usual majority" would safely prevail in the fall, only a little over half of this number actually cast ballots countywide in November. In Greenville, however, over two-thirds of the estimated eligible

electorate went to the polls. At first glance it might appear, then, that Socialist or any other minority party's November percentages should be measured against the overwhelming number of Democrat votes cast in the summer primary, lessening the apparent strength of the Socialist vote. But since the poll tax had cut out the poorest and most dissident half of the electorate in the first place, and since voting in the Democratic primary provided no incontrovertible proof of one's sentiments after all (indeed the Democratic primaries' totals were inflated by the participation of non-Democrats seeking at least some voice in their governance), in fact, the fall election is a valid indicator of rural political behavior. This is a safe-enough assumption for exploring the meaning of Socialist voting; as a relatively minute portion of the overall vote, Socialist voting's main significance lies in its indication of a tendency for structural criticism emanating from an especially militant, but otherwise representative, minority within the plain folk community. The "usual majority" quote is from the *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, Nov. 6, 1914, 1; *Greenville (Tex.) Morning Herald*, Feb. 1, 1912, 1; Book 3, 25.

104. Book 3, 25.

105. *Texas Almanac*, 1984, 587; *Rebel*, Apr. 6, 1912, 3; Book 3, 25.

106. *Commerce (Tex.) Journal*, Aug. 7, 1908, 3; Aug. 13, 1909, 6.

107. Book 3, 25.

108. A railroad company president changed Roberts's name to honor a society friend in faraway Houston. Tarpley, *Place Names*, 117; *Greenville (Tex.) Morning Herald*, Feb. 3, 1912, 3; Book 2, 34, 45, 60, 70, 122, 141, and 154; Book 3, 1, 9, 20, 25; *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, Nov. 20, 1896, 1; Nov. 11, 1898, 2; Nov. 16, 1900, 2.

109. Book 3, 25.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Manuscript Census for Hunt County, Texas, 1910; Book 3, 25; Jordan interview.

114. Clintonians were born in fifteen different states. They were Tennessee (82), Texas (81), Alabama (33), Virginia (27), Arkansas (16), Kentucky (15), Georgia (10), Mississippi (9), North Carolina (4), Louisiana (4), Ohio (2), Illinois (2), Indiana (2), Indian Territory/Oklahoma (1), and Iowa (1). This detailed analysis of Clinton's population is possible because the census taker mistakenly labeled the pages containing Clinton residents as "Clinton Village." This was normally not done for unincorporated communities. After the census takers realized the error, the heading "Clinton Village" was stricken with a single line, making the original mistake a visible and valuable one for future historians. Defining the limits of a rural community is an interesting problem. Creeks, woods, and distance provided the only concrete boundaries. County lines usually held less significance. In reality, the people of a community defined for themselves their

membership in one community over another based on concrete factors such as distance but also factors such as kinship and race. In an unincorporated community with no “city limits” membership in the community depended on the individual and on community consensus. Thus, the census taker’s mistake with Clinton is doubly valuable since it was based on what the people of Clinton (as they defined it) told him (Manuscript Census for Hunt County, Texas, 1910, part 2, 1–16).

115. Ibid.

116. Jordan interview.

117. *Alba (Tex.) Vanguard*, Mar. 4, 1905, 1; *Rebel*, July 23, 1911, 3; Hunt County Tax Rolls, 1910, 127; Walter Coleman interview.

118. Book 3, 25.

119. *Rebel*, Mar. 31, 1917, 1; May 12, 1917, 1; May 26, 1917, 1; June 2, 1917, 1; Hickey to “the Friends of the Rebel,” June 30, 1917, and Hickey to “Comrades,” Dec. 22, 1917, box 3K432, Thomas A. Hickey Papers, Research and Collections Division, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; Hickey to Clara Boeer Hickey, July 18, 1917, folder 17, box 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock; U.S. Department of Justice to Hickey attorney William D. Simpson, Mar. 25, 1918, folder 16, box 1, Hickey to A. C. Meitzen, Oct. 1, 1921, folder 17, box 1, and Grace D. Brewer to Hickey, Feb. 13, 1918, folder 17, box 1, Hickey Papers, Lubbock; *Callahan (Tex.) Caller*, Jan. 4, 1924, box 3K432, Hickey Papers, Austin. For the Post Office’s use to squelch agrarian dissent, see also Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America*, 44–45.

120. Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 119; Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 126, 130–31.

121. Historian Lewis L. Gould doubts that Ferguson’s “preemption of the land issue . . . forestalled the appearance of a radical political movement in Texas.” Socialists were done in by the “Democratic [Party] tradition and the basic conservatism of the citizenry.” Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 144; Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 119; *The Survey* 32 (July 1914), 394; McKay, *Texas Politics*, 54–56.

122. Walsh Commission, 8958; *Survey* 32 (July 1914), 394; Hunt, *Farmer Movements*, 137–38.

123. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 123–25; *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, May 5, 1914, 6.

124. *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, July 3, 1914, 3; July 17, 1914, 9. Whatever Attorney General Looney’s message to Harrison in 1914, legally, the Democratic primary “test oath” required only that “white Democrats” swear that they would vote for the nominee of the current primary and did not require an oath regarding previous support (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 80–81 and 94).

125. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 133; McKay, *Texas Politics*, 55–58; *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, July 31, 1914, 3.

126. Ferguson won by a margin of 45,504 votes (*Texas Almanac*, 1984, 587).

127. *Rebel*, Aug. 15, 1914, 1; Foley, *White Scourge*, 64–91.

128. *Greenville (Tex.) Messenger*, May 5, 1914, 6; Nov. 6, 1914, 1.

129. “Ask Relief for Tenant Farmer,” *Caddo Mills (Tex.) News*, Feb. 12, 1915, 3.

130. Ferguson’s boast that his rent control law would eliminate absentee landholdings was, of course, empty rhetoric. Ferguson and the Thirty-Fourth Legislature rejected out of hand one representative’s proposal to levy confiscatory taxes on unimproved land (*Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Thirty-Fourth Legislature*, 131, 459, 790–91).

131. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 156. Under the rent law, if an aggrieved tenant could find a local attorney to represent him in a civil action against a local landlord, he could sue to collect damages. This was possible, just not probable. Walter L. Buenger shows some success by Northeast Texas farmers in bringing suits against banks for violating the state’s usury laws (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 118).

Chapter 8. Conclusion

1. There was, perhaps, one last place to which they could run for a while. Walter Buenger reports farmers migrating to the South Plains of West Texas as land prices increased in Northeast Texas (Buenger, *Path to a Modern South*, 133–36).

Appendix C. Methods for Chapter 3

1. Systematic random sampling may replace true random sampling if the researcher safeguards against periodicity in the data (Robert S. Weiss, *Statistics in Social research: An Introduction* [New York: Wiley and Sons, 1968], 220–39).

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- Jeter, Willie Clowp. White female born November 6, 1898, Kaufman County, Texas. Interview in Commerce, June 5, 1991.
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- Mathews, Paul. White male born January 3, 1904, Hunt County, Texas. Interview in Greenville, August 14, 1991.
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- McWhirter, Julia Horn. White female born March 2, 1898, Hunt County, Texas. Interview in Commerce, August 30, 1991.
- Moxley, Ocie Miller. White female born September 28, 1899, Hunt County, Texas. Interview in Commerce, June 24, 1991.
- Nicholson, Beaulah Bell. White female born July 21, 1893, Cisco, Texas. Interview in Greenville, April 8, 1991.
- Peoples, Clifton. Black male born January 12, 1912, Hopkins County, Texas. In-

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- Rice, Robert Lee. White male born April 12, 1901, Hunt County, Texas. Telephone interview by James H. Conrad, May 5, 1993.
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